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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the visibility and acceptance of alternative family compositions in public schools. A total of 35 parent/caregivers and 24 teachers from three elementary schools in Vermont were surveyed. A review of school textbooks, curricula, and school contact forms was undertaken to determine the degree to which they represented nontraditional families. The findings indicated that teachers saw themselves as more inclusive and accepting of alternative family compositions in classroom materials and practices than parent/caregivers felt they were. The impression gained from parent/caregivers is that teachers try to be inclusive, but do not yet fully accept all family compositions in their language and practices. Results indicate that some children from alternative family compositions function under lower teacher expectations and a prevailing perception that they are at risk. Textbooks and forms do not appear to be inclusive, while formal written curricula seem to be somewhat more inclusive. Seven appendixes provide examples of: (1) the parent/caregiver survey questionnaire; (2) the request to the school districts to conduct the research; (3) the teacher survey questionnaire; (4) the text evaluation form; and (5) various student information forms. Contains 94 references. (Author/MDM)

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THE CHANGING COMPOSITION OF FAMILIES:
IMPLICATIONS FOR PARENT/CAREGIVERS AND EDUCATORS

by: Sandra J. Limoge and Paul S. Dickin

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THE CHANGING COMPOSITION OF FAMILIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR PARENT/CAREGIVERS AND EDUCATORS

by: Sandra J. Limoge and Paul S. Dickin

A Comprehensive Paper submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Masters of Education
Saint Michael's College
July 30, 1992

ABSTRACT

This pilot study focuses on the visibility and acceptance of alternative family compositions in public schools. Thirty-five parent/caregiver(s) were selected and surveyed, along with twenty-four teachers from three elementary schools of varying size and location, from Northeastern and Central Vermont. A review of school textbooks, curricula and school contact forms was also completed to determine inclusivity. Findings indicate that teachers perceive themselves as being more inclusive and accepting of alternative family compositions in classroom materials used and practices, than do parent/caregivers. The impression gained from parent/caregivers is that teachers are attempting to be inclusive, but are not yet fully accepting of all compositions in their language and practices. Conclusions indicate that some children from alternative family compositions function under lower teacher expectations and a prevailing perception of being "at risk". Textbooks and forms do not appear to be inclusive, with formal written curricula being somewhat more inclusive.

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INTRODUCTION

> We have all been raised in families and have strong feelings about the people we are related to and to the institution that binds us to them. Here is where we experienced our first emotions and ambivalences: love and hate, joy and pain, giving and taking. Family is where people touch, physically and in their total being. Here we learned to hope, to suffer disappointment, to trust and to be wary. Above all, family is where people get their start in life, where they experienced the most sharing and where they expect to be able to return in need (Bridenthal, 1982, p.225).

The people that an individual lives with in their early formative years - their kinship or domestic household - is fundamental and universal to most human beings. Most individuals refer to these people as their "family". Although the "family" experience may be universal for most people, there are assumptions about "the family" that are not universal and accepted by all. Many people, feminists in particular, are beginning to question assumptions and beliefs about the family. Some of those assumptions are: the family is monolithic; beliefs that the family is structured around roles based on gender stereotypes; and beliefs that the family is natural or biological (Thorne, 1982). Many people are also asking the question: Is the family (as an institution) in crisis and/or falling apart?

In attempting to respond to the question of whether or not the family is in crisis and/or falling apart, an important place to begin is with the definition of "family", and the expectations that go along with that definition. A general definition for the creation of a family may be as follows: A legal, and frequently religious, union of heterosexual adults to occur once in a lifetime with the purpose of procreation and socialization of children. In addition, the family is expected to provide togetherness, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health... as the marriage vow states (Bridenthal, 1982), as well as have a breadwinner husband and a full-time wife and mother (Thorne, 1982). In comparing the present day "family" with the expectations above, many may view the family as being in crisis and/or falling apart. On the other hand, what may be falling apart or in crisis is the definition of "family". The question that may need to be asked instead is: Is there a need to change the definition of "family", as well as some of the present assumptions and beliefs about the "family"?

Often times the vision and definition of the family is a mix of the ideal and reality. If we choose to compare our present day family with the ideal vision and definition of family as stated above, then we will eventually get to the point where we will have no families, because our present day domestic households will not meet the criteria for that definition (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). The language in our present definition is monolithic and singular, implying a firm, unchanging entity, always similar in shape and content (Thorne, 1982). It appears safe to assume that there will always be domestic household arrangements or organizations, and those arrangements may be ever changing. It also appears safe to assume that individuals will continue to compare the ever changing household arrangements to the present definition of the "family". With that comparison continuously occurring, it would be logical to conclude that the accepted definition of the family would also need to be ever changing. If this does not occur, then the basic fabric of our society - the family - will appear to be crumbling, and therefore our society itself may appear to be crumbling. On the other hand, if there is a change in the definition of "family" there will then be a new group of families. Goldscheider and Waite (1991) clearly state that American society confronts a profound choice: create "new families", where the changes occur within the family, and include changes in sex role responsibilities; or be left with "no families", where the changes occur outside the family, and men and women choose the alternative to change and altogether avoid marriage, parenthood or living in families.

According to Goldscheider and Waite (1991), research indicates that changes in marriage, fertility and divorce are linked to the increase in cohabitation and childbearing outside of marriage and to the growth in paid employment among women, particularly married mothers of very young children (Espenshade, 1985; Westoff, 1986; Bumpass, 1987). They also feel that restructuring of male/female relationships, both at work and at home, where men's expectations for their wives to share in economic responsibilities, and women's expectations for their husbands to share in domestic responsibilities, is at the heart of these changes (roles based on gender stereotypes). The result of these changes within the family appear to be that new generations of children are growing up experiencing the pains of family revolutions as their parents divorce, remarry or stand alone as single parents, and the rules, norms and expectations for married life in the '50's are no longer valid. A consequence of this is that increasingly, children of divorced parents are choosing not to marry (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991).

In response to the assumption that the family is natural or biological, there are many that dispute that belief. One of the definitions in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary states that a family is a group of individuals living under one roof and under one head. When asked their definition of family, the March 1992 edition of Newsweek indicated that over 70% of the respondents to a recent Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company survey thought of a family as " a group of people who love and care for each other," not as one "related by blood, marriage or adoption."

Clearly, the family has changed in the areas just discussed, and will continue to change. We therefore need to create a contemporary definition that dispells the assumptions referred to earlier, and allow it to be ever-changing to reflect the organic nature of what is "family". An example of such a definition may be: Inclusive of any group of individuals that form a household based on respect, the meeting of basic needs, including those of love and affection, and one in which assistance is freely given to maintain social, spiritual, psychological, and physical health (Bozett,1987).

If one accepts that the "family" has changed, the next question may be: Has public education redefined its role to parallel this change; and the larger question being should schools continue to change with the evolution of family and society? It appears to be a safe assumption to make that most educators have an awareness of the more evident national changes in the composition of the family, such as the rising number of single parent families due to divorce, but beyond that general awareness, what else do they know about the changes in the family? Further, what else is happening beyond that awareness level: What types of changes have educators and public schools made in attitudes, textbooks used and the curricula being presented to accommodate the changes in the family composition of today's students; and finally, what is the role of public education today? Should schools present "the model" and not adjust to reflect society's changes, or should they change with society to provide an accepting environment to students from all family compositions, as well as present alternatives for individuals to reflect upon and determine their own development?

The very nature of education is undergoing constant redefinition in the light of new changes and challenges experienced in the various areas of society. The public school system's primary function of educating has undoubtedly incurred forced expansion through demands of both changing family and the shifting nature of industry, whose needs are a major influence on the content of public education (Massialas, 1989). The family is requiring greater involvement by the schools in terms of extended "daycare" facilities to accommodate working parents (Lawton, 1980), and a move within state run services to make education a part of a team approach to welfare (linking to social service programs for example) (Gordon and Lawton, 1978). Industry meanwhile, has moved away from its traditional extraction and manufacturing base, to be more service and information oriented, with a different set of skill requirements of its workforce (Lawton, 1980). Identifying paramaters of what the school's role should be, in the light of such changes, is a vital process in ensuring that education "fits" with the make-up of society. If this point is accepted, then there are major implications for the inclusion of alternative families in formal curriulum content; schools cannot ignore such a fundamental responsibility. Education, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is defined as: "To bring up; train mentally and morally; provide schooling for". This definition clearly advocates for the inclusion of morals and values within the function of schools; the question is, whose values?

It is not the intention of this paper to discuss this issue further. Rather, this study is founded in a perspective which endorses the view that schools should reflect society and present alternatives that allow for individuals to make their own informed decisions regarding choices of lifestyle or choices of any kind that they are ultimately responsible for.

In an attempt to address some of the issues raised in this introduction, this study will: Document both historical and recent changes in the composition of the "family"; review the literature relating to formal and hidden curricula with regard to the family; attempt to gain the perspectives of parent/caregivers from alternative family compositions and educators on this issue; and review sample texts, curricula and forms to determine their inclusiveness. The hypotheses presented are that most public school personnel are somewhat exclusive in their definition of "the family", therefore excluding the "new majority" of students (i.e. those students coming from alternative family compositions) and that the textbooks (which we believe tend to drive curriculum in the primary grades) are not representing a variety of family compositions. Recommendations will be made to encourage educators, in their own practices and the materials they use, to become more inclusive of all types of family compositions, and therefore provide a safer and more inclusive environment for all students.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As previously indicated, the nature of "the family" is under constant and continuous change. It currently appears that most family compositions that do not fit the traditional definition of "family" are considered to be "alternative", or "non-traditional". The question therefore is: How visible and accepted are "alternative" family compositions in public schools today? A review of the most current literature on this and related topics clearly demonstrates the lack of material presently available that addresses this issue. This question, and the related issues, are perceived to be of grave importance in light of the growing number of children that alternative family compositions encompass (the emerging majority). With this perceived hole in information available with regard to public schools and alternative families, and the perceived lack of awareness about such an issue, it is the intention of this research to be a pilot study that will provide a description of the actual visibility and inclusiveness of alternative family compositions in three public schools in Vermont, as perceived by both educators and parent/caregivers from such compositions. This study will therefore explore the issues raised by the following questions:

- How visible are alternative family compositions in public schools today?

- How aware are educators of the presence of alternative compositions?

- How informed are educators about the nature of such families?

- What are the attitudes of school personnel towards alternative families, and what is the level of acceptance of such diversity?

- How is the concept of family being presented in schools?

- How are alternative family compositions represented in textbooks, health and social studies curricula, and other materials?

- And most importantly, are children from alternative family compositions functioning within lower teacher expectations and a prevailing perception of being more "at risk" than students from traditional families?

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE CHANGING COMPOSITION OF FAMILES

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

A REVIEW OF CHANGES IN THE FAMILY OVER THE PAST FOUR DECADES

CURRENT PERSPECTIVE:

A REVIEW OF EMERGING ALTERNATIVE FAMILY COMPOSITIONS

- Terms and statistics relating to present family compositions.
    - Two-parent family composition.
    - Step-family composition
    - Single parent family composition.
    - Co-habitation.
    - Gay and lesbian headed households.
    - Children living away from their parents.
- Vermont state statistics related to family compositions.

CLOSING SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

One of the recognized difficulties in reviewing the changes in the family and predicting its future is that we know much more about how things work in physical, biological, political and even economic systems than we do about people interrelating in families (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991). In order to understand the way things work in families, there needs to be an enormous amount of evidence gathered around what factors affect family lives. Although this may be true, according to Goldscheider and Waite (1991), one thing appears to be clear: children's experiences in the home shape the families they later form. This concept has occurred throughout history, and will most likely continue today. It therefore appears to be important to gain perspective in two areas. One of those areas is historical; since the families of yesterday helped to shape those of today, it would appear to be helpful to have some understanding of those families and the changes they went through over time. The other area is current and very possibly in the process of developing now. It includes a look at the present family compositions of our youth today, since the present family compositions will shape the families of tomorrow.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:

A REVIEW OF CHANGES IN THE FAMILY OVER THE PAST FOUR DECADES

Over the past four decades, attitudes, beliefs and practices of individuals in the United States with regard to "the family" have undergone extreme changes. Some of those changes can be experienced in the following quote:

> ...at the end of the 1950s, 80 percent of the population surveyed thought people who did not marry were neurotic, sick, or immoral. By the mid-1970s, almost the same proportion of people took a neutral view of singlehood. Getting married was something that you did or did not do according to your own desires. By 1975, three-fourths of the respondents thought it was okay if a woman had an illegitimate child and raised the child by herself (Macklin & Rubin, 1983, p.21).

During the 1950s, the United States experienced the "baby boom", as well as the continuation of an economic surge that began during World War II. The 1950s were a time when more people got married and more people were having children (both at younger ages). Suburbs also grew, and with that came the more definite separation of men's and women's work (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). According to Goldscheider and Waite (1991), this time period was the high-water mark of marriage and family.

The decade of the 1960s can be described as one of dramatic social change and "protest", as indicated by Macklin and Rubin (1983). Divorce rates surged, revolutions occurred in gender roles with the growth of female education and labor force participation, and young adults frequently chose nonfamily living arrangements (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). It was also a time during which the Women's Movement was very strong, and the general mood was one of dissidence, as was clearly seen by the antiwar and civil rights movements (Macklin, 1980). Some of the major social changes and events that occurred during the year 1967 are listed here:

- Race riots broke out in most of the big cities.
- Numerous campuses resounded with student protests.
- Many people announced they had discovered that the family was "irrelevant".
- The marriage rate dropped.
- The incidence of nonmarital intercourse among White adolescent girls rose from about 10 percent by age 18 to 30 percent or so.
- The birthrate continued to decline from its 1948-1958 boom years, but the rate of births outside of marriage started to rise rapidly, especially for teenagers (Macklin & Rubin, 1983, pp. 16 & 17).

During the 1970s, the mood of the country appeared to continue on a track similar to that of the 1960s. Change continued to be the theme, only now the change was focused on the individual, instead of society, as was the case in the 1960s (Macklin & Rubin, 1983). According to Macklin and Rubin (1983), about 80 percent of the individuals in the United States were actively seeking self-fulfillment (Yankelovich, 1981). They also state that as these individual changes occurred, the changes in the family were much less positive--rising rates of divorce, separation, nonmarital births, abortion, and domestic violence, to include abuse and neglect. An economic recession also occurred during this decade.

The 1980s proved to be a more conservative time period. As Macklin and Rubin (1983) state, in the 1980s there appeared to be an extreme turn to the right. Even though some Americans (including the Moral Majority) appeared to be choosing less individualistic and nontraditional behaviors, and some individuals yearned for the good old days, few were ready to go back to the way things were and give up many of the freedoms that had been attained (Macklin & Rubin, 1983). As indicated by Macklin and Rubin (1983), increases were also noted in alcoholism, family violence and marital breakdown, during this time.

CURRENT PERSPECTIVE:

A REVIEW OF EMERGING ALTERNATIVE FAMILY COMPOSITIONS:

Terms and Statistics Related to Present Family Compositions

One of the most significant changes in family composition has been the continued evolutionary movement toward individual freedom of choice. Although many people still marry, remain married, have children, live in single-family households, and prefer sexual exclusivity with their spouse, there is a growing awareness of options and an acknowledgment that individuals may make different choices at different points in their lives (Macklin, 1980). Some indication of the increasing diversity of family compositions and lifestyles can be obtained from U.S. Government statistics. As stated by Macklin (1980), the Bureau of Census reports indicate that, at any given point in time, the majority of households in the United States do not represent traditional nuclear families. However, due to limitations in gathering information and descriptions of household compositions, as well as some individuals' resistance to openly disclosing their family composition, it is felt that the Bureau of Census reports do not present the entire picture. Therefore, the following statistics and information have been obtained from a variety of sources and are an attempt to give a general representation of some of the significant national changes in family composition.

As of 1988, about 60 percent of the children in the U.S.

(or 38 million of the 63 million) were living with both their biological mothers and biological fathers present in the home. About a quarter (or more than 15 million) were living in single-parent families: 13.5 million with their mothers and 1.8 million with their fathers. About 7 million, or 11 percent were living with a biological parent and a stepparent. Over 3 million (or 5%) did not live with either biological parent, but with adoptive parents, grandparents or other relatives, foster parents, or in group quarters. The proportion of children living with both biological parents has declined from 67 percent in 1981 to 60 percent in 1988 (Current Conditions, 1989):

Distribution of U.S. Children Under 18
by Family living Arrangements, 1981 and 1988

	Number (in mil.)		Percent	
Child lives with:	1981	1988	1981	1988
Both bio. parents	42.6	38.0	67%	60%
Step-family	5.5	6.9	9%	11%
Mother only	11.6	13.5	18%	21%
Father only	0.9	1.8	2%	3%
Adoptive parents	1.1	1.1	2%	2%
Non-parent rel.	0.9	1.5	2%	2%
Foster parents, non-relatives,	0.5	0.4	1%	1%
TOTAL	**63.1**	**63.2**	**100%**	**100%**

Note: While the statistics quoted above refer only to 1981 and 1988 figures, information from the 1990 U.S. Cencus Bureau indicates that the total number of two-parent compositions (biological or non-biological) have not changed dramatically, single-parent family compositions have: Single mother families - 24.2%; Single father families - 3.9%

Families with children, particularly married couples with children, are a decreasing proportion of all households, with only 36 percent of all households in 1987 being occupied by families with children, compared with 45 percent in 1970. Children also continue to decrease as a share of the entire population (Current Conditions, 1989).

Throughout this paper, nontraditional or alternative family compositions are defined as: All living patterns other than legal, lifelong, sexually exclusive marriage between one man and one woman, with children, where the male is the primary provider and ultimate authority (Macklin, 1980).

Two-Parent Families

Nuclear, intact or traditional family compositions are interchangeable terms which represent a family where the adults are the biological parents and the children are natural brothers and sisters (Cline, 1990). According to Cline (1990), the Bureau of Labor indicated that in 1989 only 5.9 percent of American families fit the traditional scenario of a breadwinner husband and a wife at home with two or more children.

The most common family composition is one in which there are two parents who are wage earners and two children who are cared for outside of the home during the day. Although married couples (with and without children) still represent 59 percent of all households, married couples with young children are on the decline. The average number of children in married-couple households is 1.8, smaller now than it has ever been in our history (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990); as well as the fact that the number of married couples choosing to remain childless nearly tripled from 1970 to 1982 (Wattenberg, 1986). According the 1990 Census (Marital Status, 1990), 73% of the children under the age of 18 are living with two parents, and one or both of the parents may be either their biological, adoptive or step-parent.

Step-family Composition

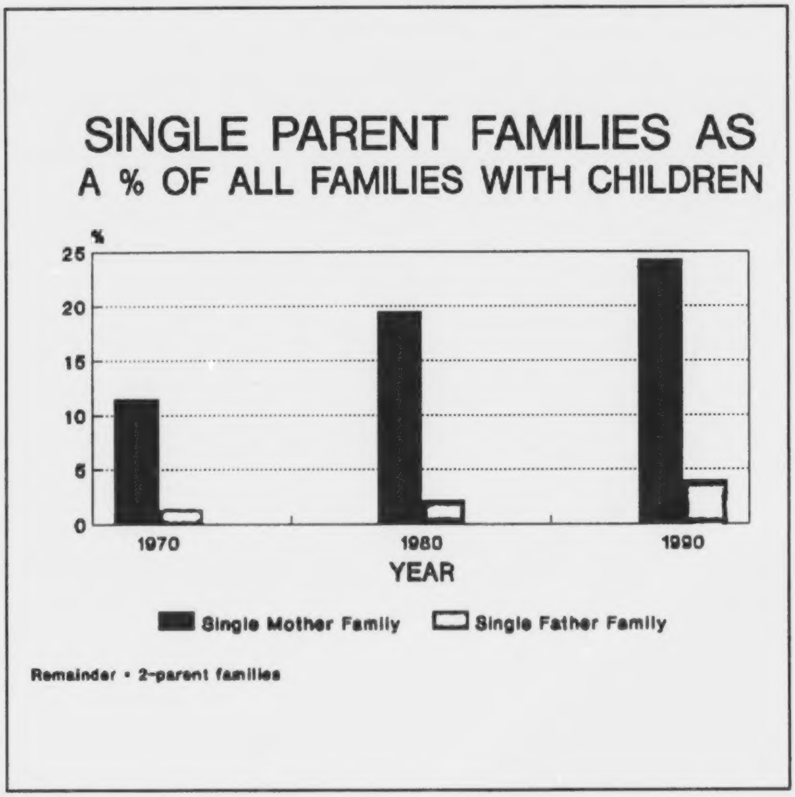
The stepfamily composition, also referred to as the "blended" or "reconstituted" family, is that in which one or both of the married adults have children from a previous union, with primary residence in the household, (Macklin, 1980); to include any children they have together in the present marriage (Cline, 1990). It is estimated that approximately 15 percent of children living with two parents are stepchildren (Marital Status, 1990). This composition is rapidly growing, as can be seen in the percentage change from 1988 (11%) to 1990 (15%). This may explain the slight change of two-parent compositions from 1988 to 1990, as reported in the footnote to the chart on page 22. While the percentage of two-parent compositions does not appear to be changing, the percentage of two biological parents may be decreasing, the percentage of step-families and adoptive families is increasing. About 1.2 million new stepfamilies are established every year (Cline, 1990). The most common step-family is a mother, her children and a stepfather (Macklin, 1980).

In the binuclear family composition the child is seen as part of a family system composed of two nuclear households - with or without parents sharing custody. Other terms used to refer to similar family compositions are "joint custody" and "coparenting" (Macklin, 1980).

Single Parent Family Composition

About half of all marriages today end in divorce, and more than a million children each year--almost 2 percent of all children--experience their parents' divorce. Between 1960 and 1975, the number of divorces and the number of children whose parents were divorced each year more than doubled (Current Conditions, 1989).

The single-parent family composition consists of a single biological or adoptive parent and the child or children who reside in the household with them. Single-parent families often form as a result of divorce or separation, the death of a parent, unplanned births (often to teen-age mothers), a planned birth by single women or adoption by a single woman or man. The proportion of children under 18 living with only one parent has doubled in the past two decades, from 12 percent to 25 percent (Marital Status, March 1990). Within the family composition of single-parents, one of the more significant realizations is that there are very diverse patterns of growth (Wattenberg, 1986). The majority of children in one-parent families live with their mothers (87 percent); the proportion of children living with their fathers has risen 4 percentage points in the past decade, from 9 percent in 1980 to 13 percent in 1990 (Marital Status, 1990). As stated by Cline (1990) it is estimated that 42 percent of white children and 86 percent of black children will live in a single-parent household sometime during their childhood. Half of all Americans will spend part of their childhood living with only one parent (Wattenberg, 1986).



In 1990, the largest proportion of single-parent children lived with a divorced parent (39 percent), which is slightly lower than the 1980 proportion of 42 percent. (In 1980, that proportion was the highest ever.) The next highest percentage (and the fastest growing) lived with a parent who had never married. Between 1960 and 1990, the proportion of children living with a never-married parent rose from 4 percent to 31 percent (Marital Status, 1990).

Within the family composition consisting of a never-married parent, the fastest-growing group is the never-married woman with dependent children. The never-married woman with dependent children is also THE fastest growing family composition within ALL the possible family compositions, not just within the single-parent category (see chart below). One out of every six children born in this country is the child of an unmarried woman (Cline, 1990). In 1986, two out of three births to unmarried women were to women over the age of 20 (Current Conditions, 1989). As indicated earlier, within the family composition of the never-married woman with dependent children, some of the births are planned and still many are not (those specifically to teen mothers). Whether planned or not though, parenting without a spouse may become a statement of independence from traditional modes of behavior (Wattenberg, 1986).

Number of Children Under 18
Living With Their Mothers Only, 1970-1988

Child lives with mother who is:	**(in millions)** **1970**	**1980**	**1988**	**% Change 1970-1988**
Divorced	2.3	4.8	5.0	+ 119%
Separated	2.3	3.0	2.9	+ 24%
Never Married	0.6	1.8	4.3	**+ 678%**
Widowed	1.4	1.3	0.8	- 39%
TOTAL	**7.5**	**11.4**	**13.5**	**+ 81%**

Source: Current Conditions, 1989

As stated earlier, within this fast growing group of never-married women with dependent children, many of the births are planned. "A growing number of women making this choice seem to be in their mid 30s and early 40s; women who are educated and financially comfortable, the kind of people who don't talk about having jobs but refer instead to their careers. They say now that they've found their careers fulfilling, they simply want to add children to their lives and will apply some of the same determination they may have displayed in their careers to becoming and being good parents" (National Public Radio, March 1992).

Since 1970, the number of women over 30 giving birth has risen five times (NPR, March 1992). As indicated by the NPR report (1992), many women who are deliberately choosing to become single mothers state that they can always choose an adult partner (no matter their age), but they can't always have children. Some single mothers choose to adopt children, but others want to have their own children for similar reasons that married women do; "...for the feeling of intimacy and exhilaration in bringing a new life out of your own" (NPR, March 1992). As indicated by a spokesperson for the national organization Single Mothers By Choice, more and more women are choosing this alternative to traditional family compositions and it is happening in more and more places around the country (NPR, March 1992).

Over 10 percent of single-parent families with children under 18 are headed by men. (Briggs and Walters, 1985; Cline, 1990; Wattenberg, 1986). The relative growth in the number of men who assume custody of minor children has been dramatic (the percentage of change from 1970 to 1988 was 1,137%, as shown in the chart below), although the actual increase in numbers has been slight (Cline, 1990). As indicated by Briggs and Walters (1985), although a great deal of attention has been given to single-mother families, fathers who are raising their children alone have been largely ignored (Gasser and Taylor, 1976; Lewis, 1978; Mendes, 1976a; Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson, 1976; Ramos, 1979). Most of the research has been on the fathers rather than the children, focusing on their needs, difficulties, adjustment process and perceived strengths. Briggs and Walters (1985) again conclude that fathers that are "seekers" (those that actively sought the single-parent status) perceived their situation more positively than fathers that were "assenters" (those who entered the status by default) (Mendes, 1976a; Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson, 1976). It has also been reported by Briggs and Walters (1985) that single-father families are likely to be more comfortable financially than single-mother families (Bilge and Kaufman 1983): The majority of custodial fathers are employed in professional and managerial jobs (Defrain and Eirick, 1981; Mendes, 1976a; Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson, 1976); and most single-fathers had completed high school; as well as many had college or post high school training (Defain and Eirick, 1981;

Mendes, 1976a; Smith and Smith, 1981). Single-fathers were more likely to be found among Whites than Blacks; in 1990, White single-fathers accounted for 17 percent of the one-parent family groups maintained by Whites, compared to the 7 percent maintained by Black single-fathers within the total of Black single-families (Household and Family Characteristics: March 1990 and 1989).

Number of Children Under 18

Living With Their Fathers Only, 1970-1988

Child lives with father	**(in thousands)**			**% of Change**
who is:	**1970**	**1980**	**1988**	**1970 - 1988**
Divorced	177	526	861	+ 386%
Separated	152	246	389	+ 156%
Never Married	30	78	371	**+1137%**
Widowed	254	180	132	- 48%
TOTAL	**748**	**1078**	**1808**	**+ 142%**

Source: Current Conditions, 1989

Cohabitation

The number of individuals that are cohabitating (unmarried and living together), has increased dramatically since 1970 (Macklin, 1980). As defined by the Census Bureau, these households consist of just two adults, with or without children, who are not related and are of the opposite sex. The number of couples cohabitating has grown dramatically in the past two decades, from 523,000 in 1970 to 2.9 million in 1990 (Marital Status, 1990). As indicated by Macklin (1980), social change rarely occurs as rapidly or dramatically as it has in this case (Glick and Spanier, 1980). In 1990, over 30% of those cohabitating households included children under the age of 15. This has also shown great change, as can be seen in the table below (Marital Status, 1990):

Unmarried Couple Households by Presence of Children

1960 - 1990

Year	**Total with Children Under 15 Years**
1960	197 000
1970	196 000
1980	431 000
1990	891 000

Gay and Lesbian Headed Households (Same Sex)

"There are an estimated eight to ten million children being raised in three million gay and lesbian headed households in the United States" (Casper, in press). Another estimate by Bozett (1987) indicates that there are anywhere from 6 million (Schulenberg, 1985) to 14 million (Peterson, 1984) children of gay and lesbian individuals. Approximately 1 to 3 million gay men are natural fathers (Bozett, 1987), and of the estimated 10% of the women in the United States that are lesbians, 15% to 20% are mothers (DiLapi, 1989).

Contrary to some individuals' beliefs, gay men and lesbians have always raised children, as can be seen in examining cultures in Europe during the Middle Ages, as well as some Native American tribes (Casper, in press). Although this is true, the number of gay families appears to be increasing, possibly due to increased visibility by gay political and social movements (Casper, in press) and "...this visibility has encouraged more gay and lesbian adults to choose to have children. Thus, we do see an increase in the numbers of gay-headed households as well as an added visibility of families who already have existed" (Casper, in press, p.3). Many gay and lesbian families that have been in existance have remained invisible due to their efforts to protect themselves from an unaccepting society, and have chosen to pass as heterosexual single parents

(Bozett, 1987).

According to Clay (1990), many lesbian mothers and gay fathers became parents during a previous heterosexual relationship (Schulenburg, 1985). Upon separation, lesbian mothers are usually the primary caregivers for their children, while gay fathers are not. As indicated earlier, recently many gay couples (lesbians in particular) have been choosing to become parents (Clay, 1990), biologically, by either conventional or artificial means of insemination, or through adoption or foster care. The creation of gay and lesbian families can be achieved in other ways as well, but the issue that can not be disputed is the fact that these individuals meet all of society's predetermined qualifications or criteria for a "family", with the exception of being heterosexual and legally married (Bozett, 1987). The following quote from Bozett (1987, p.112) summarizes this concept well: "...we're very much like other families in that we live in chaos, our children eat hot dogs and put peanut butter in their hair. The obvious difference is that there's two women in the relationship" ([Linda, a lesbian stepmother] In A Family to me: Portraits of Four American Families. A documentary videotape by Linda Harness, 1986). A study done by Harris and Turner (1986) indicates the same, "...being gay is compatible with effective parenting" (Bozett, 1987, p.52).

Due to the fact that the United States government does not legally recognize gay and lesbian families, gay or lesbian couples that do have a child or children are categorized under the heading of single parent for census information and statistics. As was clearly indicated, the statistics quoted in the above section were not from the Bureau of Census. Unlike the Bureau of Census, in this paper gay and lesbian headed households (same-sex family compositions) will not fall under the heading of single-parent families.

Children Living Away From Their Parents

According to the report, U.S. Children and Their Families: Current Conditions and Recent Trends (1989) in 1988, over 2 million children under the age of 18, or 3.2 percent, lived away from their parents. Some of these children live within other family compositions and some do not, as can be seen below.

The majority of young people who do not live with their parents are living with either their paternal or maternal grandparents or other relatives. Today 3.2 million children live with grand-parents (with or without parents present), which is an increase of almost 40 percent over the last decade, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Four per cent of all white children in the United States and 12 percent of all black children live with grandparents. Of these families, half live with both grandparents, and most of the rest live only with the grandmother (Creighton, 1991). These statistics may appear high due to the fact that in some of these situations, one or both of the child's parents may also be living in the home, but the home is maintained by the grandparent. These homes may then be considered "extended family households" where relatives or other individuals within the family share responsibility and care for each other, but they are not "multigenerational households" where grandparents or other older relatives live with their children and grandchildren (Cline, 1990).

In addition to those children living with grandparents and relatives on a full-time basis, there are millions of grandparents and other relatives who have assumed important part-time child-rearing responsibilities because of the growth of single-parent households and the number of families where both parents work (Creighton, 1991).

Along with the growing number of children living with relatives, there are also many families composed of children who are not biologically related to the parents or adult caregivers, such as foster and adoptive families. In 1986, over a quarter of a million children were in foster or substitute care (Current Conditions, 1989).

Statistics indicate that children in foster care are disproportionately black and they are distributed throughout the range of ages, although they tend especially to be in their adolescent years. Children who have already been adopted and are about to be adopted are disproportionately young, with about half of them under 6 years of age, while those awaiting adoption tend to be somewhat older (Current Conditions, 1989).

In 1980, over 260,000 children in the U.S. were living in institutions and group quarters (400 per 100,000). The proportion of those under the care of institutions, such as mental hospitals, correctional facilities, detention centers, diagnostic and reception centers, training schools, and homes for unmarried mothers, was 262 per 100,000. The proportion of those in military quarters, group homes, rooming or boarding houses, and college dorms was 146 per 100,000 (Current Conditions, 1989).

On any given night, estimates of the number of children in the United States who are homeless range from 50,000 to 500,000. From 1984 to 1988, the proportion of shelter-using homeless who are families with children has increased from 21 percent to 40 percent. The number of runaways (not usually included in calculations of homeless youth) has been estimated annually since 1976 at approximately 1 million (Current Conditions, 1989).

Vermont State Statistics Related to Family Composition

The following statistics have been taken from the U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1970, 1980 and 1990. The information for 1980 and 1990 was prepared by the Vermont State Data Center at the University of Vermont. As can be seen in the charts below, there are gaps in the statistics and information presented. This was due primarily to the lack of availablility. The following statistics therefore represent approximations and a compilation of what was found to be available.

The following definitions have been included for clarification and to assist in understanding the statistics that follow (Population and Housing, 1990):

Household: Includes all persons who occupy a housing unit. Persons not living in households are classified as living in group quarters.

Family Households: Includes a householder and one or more other persons living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. The number of family households always equals the number of families; however a family household may also include nonrelatives living with the family. (Adult siblings living together are also considered to be a family.)

Non-family Households: Includes a householder living alone or with nonrelatives only.

As of 1990, the population in Vermont was 562,758. Of that total population, 143,083 were children under 18. As can be seen in the chart below, the total 1990 population increased by over 10% from 1980, while the population of children decreased by almost 2%. The total number of households in Vermont has continued to increase, as well as the total number of families (Population and Housing, 1980, 1990):

TRENDS IN VERMONT
POPULATION, HOUSEHOLDS, FAMILIES

Description	1970	1980	1990
Total population	444,330	511,456	562,758
Pop. (children <18)	N/A	145,318	143,083
Total households	N/A	178,325	210,650
Total families	106,296	129,035	144,895
Total families (married couple with or without children)	93,309	109,042	118,905

Over the past three decades, the composition of Vermont families appears to be showing some change, although the change does not appear to be significant. In 1970, 50.7% of the family households consisted of a married couple with related children, while in 1990 just over 40% had the same make-up. The number of female-headed and male-headed households has shown an increase, as can be seen in the following figures: In 1970, 9.2% of families with children present were headed by a single male or female (separate figures were not available), while in 1990, 9.2% of those families were headed by single women, with an additional 2.8% headed by single men. Overall, these trends indicate that Vermont is experiencing an increase in households headed by single parents, more and more individuals are establishing family living arrangements that do not resemble traditional families (e.g. sisters living with sisters), and fewer married couples are having children. Other interesting statistics showing changes from 1980-1990 relating to Vermont families are as follows(Population and Housing, 1970, 1980, 1990):

Never married : increase of approximately 8%
Married: increase of approximately 9%
Divorced: increase of approximately 40%

A closer look at children in Vermont indicates that in 1990, fewer children were living in married couple households (i.e. biological or step-parents) as compared with 1980 and, as stated in the previous discussion, an increase was shown in the number of children that live with a single parent. Vermont children living with other relatives (i.e. with a non-parent relative, such as grandparents, aunts, etc.) has remained stable over the last ten years, showing only a slight decrease (> 0.5%). Those living with non-relatives (i.e. foster care) has shown a slight increase since 1980, while there has been a significant decline in the numbers of children living in an institutionalized setting. Finally, there has been a slight decrease in the number of children living in "other group quarters" (Population and Housing, 1980, 1990):

VERMONT CHILDREN UNDER 18
1980 and 1990

DESCRIPTOR	1980 #	1980 %	1990 #	1990%
Householder/Spouse	306	.2	149	0.1
In Married Couple Fam	115, 069	79.2	108, 616	76.9
In Single Mother Fam	21, 396	14.7	20, 715	14.5
In Single Father Fam	combined w above		5, 594	3.9
Living With Other Rel	5, 127	3.5	4, 409	3.1
Living With Non- Rel	2, 690	1.9	3, 187	2.2
Institutionalized	406	0.3	140	0.1
Other Group Quarters	324	0.2	273	0.2
TOTAL CHILDREN	145, 318	100 %	143, 083	100%

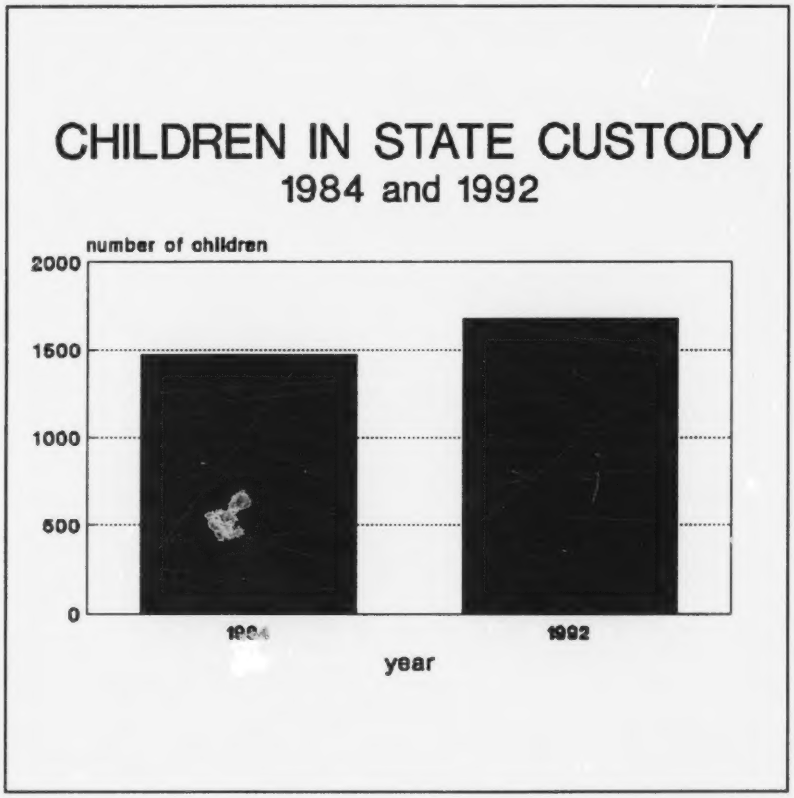
1980: Single Mother + Single Father Combined

The following information was obtained via interview from the State Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services, and gives some indication of the number of young people (18 and under) in the state of Vermont who are presently in state custody, the majority of whom are not living with their biological parents (the numbers presented are an approximation and are ever changing).

As of 4/1/1992:	1,678	young people were in SRS custody or in a subsidized adoptive situations where the state was assisting the adoptive family financially.
Of that 1,678:	1,163	young people did not live with their biological or adoptive family. (A child can be in SRS custody and still live with their biological family.)
Of the 1,163:	670	young people were in foster homes
	147	young people were in group homes
	68	young people were in residential placements
	90	young people were in independent or supervised independent living situations
	33	young people were in institutions
	57	young people were in non-finalized adoptive situations
	84	young people were living with relatives
	15	young people were considered runaways

The number of young people in the custody of the state has increased significantly in the past two years in particular. Not only have the numbers increased, but the needs of these individuals has also become much more intense, according to an State Rehabilitative Services representative.

The following graph supports the above information and was obtained from The Vermont Children's Forum 1991 publication entitled "The Kids in Our Backyard":



CLOSING SUMMARY

In the preceding pages, an attempt has been made to answer some of the questions asked in the introduction: Is the family falling apart or in crisis? Is there a need to change the definition of the family, as well as some of the present assumptions and beliefs about the family: The family is monolithic, the family is structured around roles based on gender stereotypes, and the family is natural or biological?

Most individuals would be able to answer those questions, and chances are the majority of those answers would be very different. After reviewing the literature on the preceding pages, though, one conclusion can be clearly drawn - there is a need to change the definition of FAMILY, due to the fact that the majority of our children do not live in households that support the traditional definition. The traditional definition is no longer applicable -today most families do not consist of "heterosexual adults that are legally married (for the first time) and that have two or more biological children together". If this definition continues to be used, it could become detrimental to children (especially those children from the emerging family compositions discussed earlier, as well as any other composition that may emerge out of need or desire). The definition of family needs to be "inclusive", and possibly even more importantly, our attitudes about the emerging family compositions need to be inclusive - inclusive of any group of individuals that form a household based on respect, the meeting of basic needs, as well as those of love and affection, and one in which assistance is freely given to maintain social, spiritual, psychological, and physical health (Bozett, 1987). If the traditional definition is maintained, and the majority of children today do not come from family compositions that "fit" into the definition, then we may possibly be "rejecting" those children as well. Social rejection is clearly not the way to create and support positive self image and self esteem in children today. With half of all Americans spending part of their childhood living with only one parent (Wattenberg, 1986), are we as a society rejecting such a large percentage of the population?

With comments such as these, it is hard to think otherwise: "The body of data leads to the inescapable conclusion that single parenting is harmful to children", as stated by sociologist Amitai Etzioni (Leo, 1992, p.19). Another quote that appears to cast a negative image on nontraditional families is as follows: "Rising rates of divorce, out-of-wedlock childbearing and absent parents are not just manifestations of alternative lifestyles, they are patterns of adult behavior that increases children's risk of negative consequences" (Leo, 1992, p.19). And as stated by the former secretary of education, Chester Finn, "With rare exceptions, two-parent families are good for children, one-parent families are bad" (Leo, 1992, p.19). With these opinions and attitudes of leaders in our society, what are the messages being given to today's children by educators and by the materials and textbooks they use? The desire to pursue an answer to that question was instrumental in the creation of this paper, and will be discussed at greater length in the following sections.

In the hopes that our society will someday choose to change the definition of family and the negative attitudes towards individuals that do not fit the definition, then our focus can be on issues of far greater importance. Issues of "quality" can then be addressed--the quality of families today. With so many of our children today living in physically and/or emotionally unhealthy environments, there is a very strong need to change our focus. It seems apparent that our focus as a society and as educators no longer can be on a child's family composition but rather on the safety and well being of that child, within their family composition. Whether the family composition is one with two biological parents or a single mother by choice, the focus now needs to be on creating safe and healthy environments for children, and places where the adult caregivers are happy to see their child's face (Thomas, 1988). It is in hopes that educators, with awareness and information, can lead society in this "inclusiveness" and focus on the health of families rather than pass judgement on their composition.

Educators are faced with this challenge once again: To lead society rather than follow.

The following quotation is taken from the tape, "Free To Be... A Family" by Marlo Thomas and Friends (1988). It is felt that these words summarize the above thoughts well.

Free To Be...A FAMILY by The Melody Makers

We're all branches of the same big family tree,
but every family's different, don't you know?
Reachin' for the sun comes very naturally.
We've only got to let each other grow!

I've got a home...
I've found my place...
I live with people who are glad to see my face.

We're free to be...
you and me,
and you and me,
we're free to be a ...family!

We're all workin' in the same big marching band,
but drums and horns have different things to say.
All together we'll ring music through the land
We've only got to let each other play!

I've got a place...
I've found my home...
I'm only solo when I want to be alone.

We're free to be...
you and me,
and you and me,
we're free to be a...family!

So many groups in the family soup,
So many combinations,
Might be people who look like you
or they might be no relation!
Birds of a feather, they flock together,
Yes, sometimes they do.
But if a little bird joins an elephant herd,
Hey, that's a family too!

LITERATURE REVIEW OF FORMAL AND HIDDEN CURRICULA

INTRODUCTION

FORMAL CURRICULUM

SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

HIDDEN CURRICULUM

CLOSING SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

After documenting the recent changes in the family, an equally important focus is on public education; how has public education responded to the changes in the family? An attempt will be made to answer that question by focussing on a sample population of educators and parent/caregivers, to gain perspectives on current practices in public schools.

At the core of this issue is a double edged question: What are the prevailing (mainstream and otherwise) perspectives of the definition of "family"; and which (if any) of those opinions are/should be presented as a part of the public school curriculum? The topic is not without an historical background and is continually being addressed, due to its organic, provocative nature. At the time of writing this paper, "family values" is being tabled once again in the national political agenda, in a high-profile manner which characterizes the existing conflicts of opinions on the expanded presence of "alternative family compositions" in U.S. society.

The Bush-Quayle administration is aggressively forcing the electorate to challenge their attitudes toward what they term "broken families" (New York Times, May 21, 1992, p.B 16). The specific implications for school:family relations are pointedly conceptualized in this current political debate (as will be described in this literature review), but two quotes serve to introduce the notion that discussion of "family" (both in and out of schools) is not an easy issue to accommodate. Vice President Quayle, in his initial public address on this 'poverty of values' called for 'social sanctions' against women who bear children out of marriage, stating: "It doesn't help matters when primetime TV has Murphy Brown--a character who supposedly epitomizes today's intelligent, highly paid, professional woman--mocking the importance of fathers, by bearing a child alone and calling it just another "lifestyle choice"... Ultimately, marriage is a moral issue that requires cultural consensus and the use of 'social sanctions'. Bearing babies irresponsibly is, simply, wrong." (New York Times, May 20, 1992, p.A20). A public outcry following this sweeping condemnation of (specifically) single mothers forced Mr. Quayle to qualify his statement the following day: "I have the greatest respect for single mothers. They are true heroes" (New York Times, May 21, 1992, p.A1).

People often care deeply in opposing directions, such as believing in the 1950's (traditional) family, but also accepting the value or the necessity of women working outside the home. This study is founded in the belief that children from alternative family compositions may be adversely affected by presentation of "family" in schools in only a traditional (i.e. two-parent) format--just as adults have been by Dan Quayle's exclusive view of 'family'--and that there is a consequent need to examine the practices currently in use.

But before that can be done, a review of literature regarding formal and hidden curricula as they relate to the family must be undertaken to provide the additional background necessary to frame this study, and to provide a convincing rationale for the need for such an endeavor.

This literature review explores some of the possible consequences for children of public schools following a formal curriculum that is exclusive in nature; of teachers transmitting exclusive messages through hidden curricula that posits a preference for two-parent families; and of textbooks that fail to represent the diversity of family compositions in the U.S., as documented in the preceding literature review.

> The large purposes of education can be defined in reference to the culture, the society, and the individual. Education performs the elemental function of perpetuating the social institutions & value structure of the culture. Almost an instinctive instrument of preservation, the school joins the home and other social forces inducting the child at an early age into the established values of his place and time....But in a society that is marked by social conscience and scientific intelligence, the schools and colleges are properly instruments of criticism and analysis. They enable a people to generate a critical consciousness of themselves and examine and appraise themselves, their inheritances, and their creations....Social criticism is clearly a fundamental responsibility of education.
>
> (McMurrin, 1971, p.148)

The above quotation epitomizes the dichotomy presented by the conflicting long-range functions of public schools. It represents a fundamental conflict between the inculcation of socially valued beliefs and the need for students to question those beliefs and develop a critical consciousness. Gordon (1984) conceptualizes the conflict as one that has an inculcative function ("to serve as a media for transmitting values, beliefs and ideology of (one's) community to the next generation", p.17), and an epistemic function ("The system of public education in the United States is designed to gain the skills necessary to become knowlegdeable and productive participants in a democratic society", p.19). Clearly, if public education allows students to develop a critical consciousness, it is impossible to place limits on which beliefs and values are to be questioned. Even the law has failed to overcome the ambiguity of the school's role in facilitating these joint functions, for although the First Ammendment enables individuals to formulate and maintain their own political, moral, or religious understandings of reality, free from any rights or claims of others to dominate (or of government to control) that understanding, the Supreme Court has held that school officials may prevent expression of beliefs if that expression creates a substantial danger of disrupting the educational process (Gordon, 1984).

This conflict is exemplified by a number of contemporary issues. The continuing struggle for racial equality through the civil rights movement, and the renewed push for unequivocal equality for women are both evidence of the challenge to longstanding values and practices that continue to be inculcated not just in public schools, but in society as a whole.

Historically, women's paid jobs have been subject to "immense pressure for external control" (Apple, 1985, p.x), while society has maintained stereotyped images of women as homemakers. The feminist movement has presented a directly contradictory view of the role of women in the western world today. Like women, black people "seem to suffer a dual oppression. For not only is the social formation unequal by class... but added to this are the powerful forces of race and gender reproduction as well" (Apple, 1985, p.4). Conversely, the recent upsurge in anti-semitic behaviors and the increased reporting (and marginal increase in practice) of child abuse demonstrate the depth of social 'conditioning' that is still present in society.

The notion of "family" is an issue that permeates all of these and other "hot" topics. Comparisons are constantly made between the dominant lifestyles of the various cultures represented in U.S. society, generally to the detriment of any family types that are not considered to be representative of traditional family values: Evidence can be easily found to support the view that public school is one of the agents for the preservation of such prevailing prejudices. For example, one study found that 36% of books reviewed presented black families from a culturally deviant perspective (i.e. that the farther one moves from the white, middle class, nuclear family, the more dysfunctional that family becomes) (Bryant & Coleman, 1988).

The "family" is arguably the most fundamental of all traditional bastions currently being critiqued. The two-parent household, the model definition of the term "family", as referenced in the previous literature review by Sandra Limoge, is essentially being challenged in two ways: That it has always been presented as a necessary moral to adopt if one is to achieve personal fulfillment; and that its primary function has always been as an agent of social control (Kelly, 1982, p.75).

In support of the first criticism, Horner (1975) suggests that children continually evaluate themselves and try to imitate the dominant stereotypes presented to them (in textbooks, discussion, experiences, etc), and that when conflicts arise, kids tend to decide in favor of the norm. If one agrees that work, marriage and parenthood are the major roles by which adulthood is confirmed and positive reinforcement given in American society, then that is the norm that children will favor (Knaub, Eversoll and Voss, 1981). Negative reinforcement of alternative family lifestyles is similarly evidenced; for example, Nolan, Coleman and Ganong (1984) concluded from their review of family textbooks, that there is a subtle, deficit-family model applied to step-families (the focus of their research) as indicated by little discussion of successful functioning, a predeliction toward discussing stresses, and a greater than usual incidence of giving recommendations to improve their functioning that are not found in references to two-parent (i.e. traditional) families.

These same arguments apply to the latter notion of viewing families as agents for social control. If children are constantly told that happiness is most likely to come from a monogamous, heterosexual marriage, then society is in effect, attempting to "set ideological limits" on students' thinking (Apple, 1990, p.83). Dan Quayle, in his speech which introduced this review, drew a distinct causal relationship between a perceived lack of traditional family values and the rioting in Los Angeles which followed the Rodney King trial: "I believe the lawless social anarchy which we saw is directly related to the breakdown of family structure, personal responsibility and social order in too many areas of our society" (New York Times, May 20, 1992, p.A1).

In essence, this way of thinking appears to support the belief that through the preservation of traditional family roles (mother, father, children), certain responsibilities ensue which focuses attention on personal inadequacies, rather than societal/ governmental failures. This in turn encourages internalization of frustration due to perceived self-deficiency, as opposed to external demonstration against society as the perceived wrongdoer.

It is commonly considered that the family itself plays the most significant role in shaping a child's understanding of the world (Family Research Council of America, Inc., 1986). Apple (1990) points out that family, schools, government and industry are all social agents, and that the school is a close rival to the family in this respect . "In many ways, this criticism (of political, cultural and economic institutions) has been healthy, since it has increased our sensitivity to the important role schools--and the overt and covert knowledge within them--play in reproducing a stratified social order that remains strikingly unequal by class, gender, and race" (Apple, 1985, p.9). Apple (1990, p.6) refers to the role of schools in this sense, as agents of "cultural and ideological hegemony." Thus, attention now turns to focus on schools as inculcators of traditional values and beliefs about families, which this research paper is attempting to explore.

To construct a frame of reference for this study, a review of the literature in four distinct areas is necessary. An evaluation of the school:student relationship itself incorporates three broad identifiable interfaces: The formal curriculum, as defined by the selected content of instruction; the associated curriculum materials used to convey that content (textbooks, workbooks and so forth); and the nature of the instructor's adopted perspective or "bias" when facilitating learning (Sockett, 1976). Parallel to this study, the sense given by the previous literature review by Sandra Limoge of the trends and current statistics regarding family composition offers parameters on the extent of students directly involved in "alternative" family lifestyles; and the nature of the rate of change in backgrounds that the United States (and particularly Vermont) is experiencing.

FORMAL CURRICULUM

Formal curricula are determined through a variety of means. Historically, one can trace the formalization of schooling and public school development, which indicates the emergence of more diverse and complex interests asserting influence on the content of education (Gordon & Lawton, 1978). Since education first digressed from a strictly academic focus that was forced by the move for progressive education (Dewey, 1916), societal changes have added new dimensions to the functions of formal schooling. At least eight implicit focii or intertwined systems now impact upon a public school curriculum: Socio-political, economic, communicative, rational, technological, moral, belief, and aesthetic (Lawton, 1980).

The politicization of the curriculum is an entire field of study in itself, though it is important in the context of this paper to recognize the ongoing attempts to institutionalize the curriculum (i.e. make it a separate object of social policy), and that this politicization symbolizes the dispute over professional autonomy between politicians and administrators (Barrow, 1976; Jenkins & Shipman, 1981; Richards, 1977). In essence, curricula are shaped by a number of influences; politicians' views of what is best for "society", local authorities' identified needs for local communities, school boards' views on what is best for students' personal development, and teachers' choice of direct service delivery. Each group may have very different goals for students, hence they each exert their influence to shape curricula in ways they see as important. In spite of their position as implementors of curricula, teachers are viewed as having limited influence over its form (Becher and Maclure, 1978; Lawton, 1980).

Two important implications of a politicized curriculum are the increased pressure on teachers to plan by objectives, and the adoption of interdisciplinary teaching. Both indicate a shift in the role of school: No longer are schools protecting children from the problems facing larger society; rather, they are simulating the 'real world' to allow for broader learning experiences and to make students' processing skills fit with the changing nature of the economy, industry and society (Lawton, 1980; Massialas, 1989).

In terms of teaching about "family", this increased representation of reality would imply an increased representation of alternative family compositions, since the reality is an increasingly diverse society (as documented in the previous review of demographic trends). Of all the content areas, it is the social studies program that is directly charged with transmitting--and developing new methods of transmitting--the accumulation of knowledge and social experiences of a given society (Solomon, 1988). "Social studies materials (which either do not present conflict, or present it as dysfunctional) can contribute to the reinforcing and tacit teaching of certain dominant basic assumptions and, hence, a pro-consensus and anti-dissension belief structure" (Apple, 1990, p.96).

In view of these statements, the social studies is a focus for this research. "At the elementary level, the key objective of social studies education is the development of students' understanding of themselves and their immediate environment as a microcosm of the larger world." (Ma. Council for the Social Studies, 1989). Within this definition, one can certainly identify several concepts: Geographic, historical, political, economic and socio-cultural (that is, self-esteem, acceptance and social institution/awareness of "family"). A brief analysis of what constitutes a social studies curriculum will assist in providing a foundation for the research presented later in this paper.

Some states have very clearly defined programs of study that are mandated in their public schools. Louisiana, for example, has a number of sequentially ordered objectives by grade level: In grades K-1, where the focus is on "Home, Family and Community", they state their expectations in terms of "Learner Outcomes":

> 1) The student will recognize that people live mainly in families.
>
> 2) The student will enumerate roles of family members in providing and preparing food in the home.

3) The student will identify the different types of structures called a home (house, apartment, etc.).

(La. State Department Of Education, 1981).

In Vermont, individual schools have a good deal more freedom in setting their curricula. Aside from federal mandates for certain elements (e.g. drug and alcoholism, AIDS awareness), the State Department of Education publishes a "Framework for the Development of a Social Studies Scope and Sequence", and has devised a set of standards that form the basis of public school approval (Vt. Board of Education, 1986, 1991). The contents of this framework are very broad, and not a great indicator of what is being taught in Vermont primary social studies classes. In grades K-3 for example, under the heading of "family", the framework merely suggests the following:

3. Identify different family structures.
4. Identify the physical and social needs of the family.
5. Identify tasks that people must do in the family and at school.
7. Recite personal biographical data.

Research on the detail of social studies curricula does not appear to be very extensive, though one in-depth and well-constructed study by Bakalars and Petrich (1983) sought to identify the extent to which family-related content was actually taught in elementary schools. Their factor analysis of 70 'family' concepts led to conclusions that the category of "Family and Society Interacting" was taught only to a slight extent, while "Developing as a Family Member" was taught only to a slight to moderate extent.

Clearly then, formal curriculum statements and guidelines offer only a limited insight into the nature of what is taught in public schools. It is suggested that there is a pervasive myth of standardization of instruction based on the broad similarity of such guidelines (Gross & Dynneson, 1983); and that more often than not, teachers teach directly from highly structured textbooks.

SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

> While almost every state imposes broad study requirements, curriculum decision-making in the U.S. depends almost entirely on the content of textbooks. Especially at the primary level, the textbook tends to be the curriculum: The teacher merely starts at the beginning and works his or her way through.
>
> (Gordon, 1984, p.553)

This opinion has a wealth of supporting references (e.g. Goodlad, 1984; Jackson, 1986). If textbooks were generally considered to be of high quality this may not be a negative situation, but the quality of textbooks is highly questionable: "Think of social studies texts...that treat Rosa Parks as merely an African American who was simply too tired to go to the back of the bus, rather than discussing her training in organized civil disobedience at the Highlander Folk School" (Apple, 1990, p.ix). With regard to family, it has been suggested that textbooks are a vehicle through which the theoretical, ideological and epistemological orientations as well as fundamental concepts of educational pedagogy are expressed (and legitimized), and through which differing versions of reality regarding the family are transmitted (Zinn and Eitzen, 1988; Pearson et al, 1979).

Along with social studies texts, it is also suggested that reading series have a central role in the socialization of children: "They are officially approved instruments used in schooling at a critical period of development. They portray society's approved role models, career choices and the gender and race behaviors considered appropriate. They are a major source of both overt and subliminal conditioning of children, and are unrealistic, undemocratic and uninspiring" (Britton and Lumpkin, 1983, p.6).

There currently exists an extensive volume of studies that focus on isolated aspects of American society, e.g. the presence of positive black families (Bryant and Coleman, 1988), or the inclusion of religion (Vitz, 1985) in children's literature. However, there appears to be little documentation of the inclusion--and the nature of that inclusion--of various alternative family types in elementary textbooks. The implications of being excluded from stories and consequent discourse are great, impacting upon self-esteem as well as comprehension, since this is partially based on students' past experiences, which may be very different from the type of family lifestyles presented (Klebacher, 1984; Pearson et al 1979). This is particularly relevant at the elementary level, as children are often exposed to variations of circumstance for the first time. Children are at an impressionable age and yet are faced with compulsory readings that may indirectly make them feel "different" than their peers and insecure in that difference (Britton & Lumpkin, 1983).

Overarching studies on the development and history of "family" in children's books tend to be too vague to use as reference material for any study. Those reviewed also appear to reach conflicting conclusions; some claiming that family life is still portrayed as predominantly two-parent and nuclear (Garcia et al, 1988; Lystad, 1979), while others conclude that representations are increasingly diverse and balanced (Klein and Smith, 1985; Knaub, Eversoll and Voss, 1981). One of the largest of such studies, undertaken from a very traditionalist standpoint, claims that families are simply defined as a group of people that live together; and that the emphasis in current trade books is on the many types of family, all being made implicitly equally legitimate (Vitz, 1985). Finally, as an aside to their focus on interracial inclusion in basal readers, two researchers noted that only 22 out of 2843 (i.e. <1%) stories reviewed showed one-parent families (Britton & Lumpkin, 1983).

One prominent research study focussed on basal readers for grades 1-3, and was undertaken for the very reason that few such investigations had taken place (Evans, 1982). The study reviewed 1,144 stories (347 about families) in 14,476 pages of text. The findings showed that 6% of families portrayed were one-parent families; no stories mentioned step-children; the family structure was often vague and implicit; the death of a parent was referred to twice (both occurrences prior to the story); one story was of an adopted child; one of an orphan; and one set in a boys' group home.

One other study determined that 76% of second grade readers related stories about children and adults in some form of relationship (Kealey, 1980). In this research, 38% of children lived in one-parent families (though only one story stated explicitly that one of the parents did not live at home). Fifty-one out of fifty-two single parent stories ignored the other parent in both the text and the art work. Of the total number of stories, 82% mentioned mother:child relationships, and 72% mentioned father:child relationships. The study concludes that between 22-50% of basal stories center around single-parent families. Divorced or deceased parents are never mentioned and separation is inferred only once. All families showed strong, caring relationships among all members.

When numerous authors make reference to the importance of textbooks on shaping a child's opinion about what is "normal" and acceptable in society, it seems remarkable that so little research has taken place that looks specifically at the representation of family composition in those books. "The influence of textbooks on education demands the attention of school boards, administrators and parents" (Hadeed, 1984,p 112). And yet textbooks themselves are used to support politically biased presentation of material (Apple, 1985).

HIDDEN CURRICULUM

> Enculturation takes place through conscious and unconscious conditioning toward norms of culture in successive stages over the passage of time....It is foolish to believe that with all of the subliminal cues, geography and history lessons, school discipline and teacher role models acting on a child, a significant portion of enculturation does not take place within schools and away from parents.
>
> (Schwartz & Wynne, 1985, p.65).

As stated earlier, the ways in which a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control (Kelly, 1982). There is enormous evidence to suggest that the efforts of progressive education have failed to prevent the negative values it targeted from being ingrained through what is stylistically referred to as the "Hidden Curriculum" (Garcia et al, 1988; Havelock, 1971; Wexler, 1976; Young, 1971). Acceptance of the impact of the hidden curriculum is acceptance of the idea that students internalize the values presented (Massialas, 1989).

The hidden curriculum, originally identified by Jackson (1968), is the underlying method of delivering moral and social messages to students. It can be viewed at a policy making level (such as federal or state requirements); or at a classroom level, which examines the impact of teacher bias in presenting and processing information. It is on this level that this study focuses. It is proposed that educators, like their students, seek and transmit values that are consistent with their own backgrounds (Solomon, 1988). Once again, there is a suggestion that social studies provides "some of the most explicit instances of the hidden teaching", offering further reason for this study to focus on this subject (Apple, 1990, p.87). Studies have documented the presence of this hidden agenda related specifically to the teaching of alternative lifestyles: "Some instructors are less interested in 'teaching' and more interested in 'advocacy'...They do a disservice to education because they present an incomplete picture to the student, pressure the individual into making choices that the instructor considers to be morally correct, and, consequently, restrict the student's freedom of choice" (Macklin and Rubin, 1983, p.363).

There are a number of areas at the classroom level that afford opportunity for potential bias in presentation of family norms and acceptance, through stereotyping, reviewing lifestyles, fragmentation or isolation, linguistic bias, noting of the positive role models, or invisibility or omission (Solomon, 1988). This last point refers to what Eisner (1979) termed, "the null curriculum". In essence, this refers to areas of subject matter, intellectual processes, and values which are left out of the constructed curriculum. "Whether intentional or unintentional, the null curriculum plays a significant role in education because it determines , to a large extent, the knowledge base of learners, of the future members of society" (Peretz, 1990, p.52). There is of course, evidence that suggests that many educators are sensitive to this potential, for example, through organizing to combine actions against patriarchal relations, against racism, and toward the building of alternatives to current educational content and methods (Apple, 1985, p.173); yet the implications are great for those children that are exposed to a limited, selective presentation of role models and values (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Braverman, 1974).

Teaching values is recognized as a legally and morally appropriate practice; but the purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the presentation of information (that involves discussion with students), rather than its transmission (that implies exhortation, coercion and reward/punishment [Gordon, 1984]). Studies provide clear evidence that teachers are unaware of their classroom behavior and that their beliefs about parents' influence ultimately affect their awareness of individual students (Good & Brophy, 1987). The effects of conscious or unconscious separatism or rejection of a particular family composition--or its absence from a classroom agenda--may be profound and long-standing.

CLOSING SUMMARY

If, as the literature suggests, most courses and texts do not reflect the reality of the diverse family forms in U.S. society, then we as educators are not serving the needs of a large percentage of the student population (Zinn and Eitzen, 1988). Research has even begun to document the kinds of prevailing prejudices that some educators harbor, and which may be transmitted to children: "We began noticing letters from sole parents who said they were having difficulty communicating with schools. One mother complained that a teacher had referred to her daughter's family as, "not normal", because there weren't two parents in the home." (Clayfalk, 1979, p.79). With evidence such as this, schools can no longer relate to children and parents as though there are two parents in the home.

It is a fact that one-parent homes produce a more disproportionate number of low scoring students in high achievement groups and a disproportionately high number of students in low achievement groups (Brown, 1980). Some people interpret this as a result of less parent bonding in such alternative home environments (Family Research Council of America, Inc., 1986), while others perceive these families as needing additional support from schools, due to their dysfunction (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1979). In the past, studies on this topic have been constructed within similar paradigms: Are there differences between children in two-parent families and children in one-parent families, in their attitudes, motivational level, their 'inner discipline', their pride in their work? (Clayfalk, 1979). The research presented next reflects an attempt to view alternative lifestyles as a part of the norm; an attempt to determine whether people from these home environments are either accepted or at least visible in public schools. **It does not assume that all children suffer as a result of family change.** Rather, it is based upon a perceived need for curricula that consider a spectrum of family units as being acceptable, and upon a need for definitions that are broad and inclusive, not exclusive or value laden. As Rutter (1979) suggested in his ground-breaking work on the effects of schooling on children, education is a complex process in which teachers should attempt to match instructional methods to students' home environments, accepting children for who they are when they arrive at school. Those who work in elementary schools need to pay more attention to the families we are responsible to, and in some respects, responsible for (Parker, 1979). Educators can view the presence of alternative family backgrounds not as a threat or something distasteful, but as an opportunity to promote acceptance and understanding of others:

> The children in my class come from widely diverse backgrounds and cultures, so that in school they are confronted with a wonderful variety of ideas, ways of thinking, family and social traditions, situations of co-operation and conflict.
>
> (Martin, 1990, p.316).

METHODOLOGY

RATIONALE FOR A COLLABORATIVE STUDY

CENTRAL STRANDS WITHIN THE RESEARCH

- Perspectives of Parent/Caregiver(s)
- Perspectives of School Personnel
- Evaluation of Text, Curricula and School Contact Forms

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

RATIONALE FOR A COLLABORATIVE STUDY

This project developed from similarities in the focii of two independent studies, both looking broadly at the nature of school- family relationships in the light of emerging (and established) alternative family compositions. One centered upon the family, the other on public schools. A decision was made to set common parameters on each of the studies that would allow for direct comparison of the two paradigms. In choosing to incorporate these potentially conflicting perspectives between school personnel and family representatives, there emerged the need for a third, more objective probe into materials currently being used. Therefore, the three central strands within this research are: Perspectives of parent/caregiver(s), perspectives of school personnel, and an evaluation of texts, curricula and school contact forms currently in use.

It became clear that the tasks involved could be easily isolated into inter-related pockets of research, and that the two potential studies fit well together to create a more complete picture. Hence, the overall study became more manageable as a collaborative effort, enhancing its comprehensiveness. Further benefits of collaborating became apparent as the project progressed: Affording both researchers alternative points of reference, allowing each still to pursue their own personal interest areas in the literature reviews, and providing the study with a greater knowledge base from which to proceed. The focus of the literature reviews determined how tasks were divided between the two researchers: Sandra Limoge facilitated the study relating to families by reviewing the literature, initiating and developing contacts, analyzing school contact forms sent to families, and eventually tallying raw data from the various family compositions. Paul Dickin facilitated the study relating to schools by reviewing the literature, initiating and developing contacts, analyzing text and curricula, and tallying of raw data from the three target schools. Data analysis and discussion, conclusions and recommendations were developed collaboratively.

From the outset, it was our intention to conduct a broad pilot study on the acceptance of emerging family compositions in public schools, in order to focus attention on the issues presented and to highlight the need for further, more detailed research.

CENTRAL STRANDS WITHIN THE RESEARCH

Perspectives of Parent/Caregiver(s)

One very clear intention of this study was to identify the perceptions of alternative family members with regard to their acceptance and visibility in public schools. Our desire was to be as inclusive as possible in terms of the scope of "alternative" families that exist today, due to the fact that over 40% of today's compositions do not fit the traditional definition of "family" (i.e. both biological parents, legally married and living in the same household). Our definition of "alternative" family compositions encompassed the following:

Step Families
Single-Parent Families (female and male headed)
Single-Parent Families with Non-Parent Adult in the Home
Foster/Adoptive Families
Same Sex Families (i.e. homosexual adults as caregivers)
Non-Parent Relative as primary caregiver(s) (i.e. Aunt, Uncle, Grandparents)
Other (as defined by respondant(s))

Our desire was to elicit opinions on a number of school-related issues from a representative sample within each of the above compositions. Given the large scale of this objective, it became clear that some type of survey would be the most feasible form of data collection, rather than the more time-consuming personal interviews with each respondant. Once we had determined that we would use a survey format, we based its format on prior research conducted by the National Committee for Citizens in Education (1981), which focused on a survey of single parents and how schools met their needs. We then narrowed our own focus through dialogue with professionals in the field, friends and colleagues from "alternative" family compositions, as well as feedback received from an initial pilot survey. As a result of these probes, identified changes were made and it was determined that the survey would be sub-divided into the following four areas: General Information (demographics), School Curriculum and Materials, Communication, and Attitudes of School Personnel (see Appendix A).

Initially we intended to focus on one school, surveying the parent/caregivers' and teachers' beliefs about the subject matter, and reviewing that school's textbooks, curriculum content and materials. A school district was then identified and upon request a proposal to conduct research was completed (see Appendix B). In discussing the proposed research with the district representative, it was determined that accessing specific alternative families whose students attended our target school was problematic due to confidentiality and legal issues. As a result, it was decided that parent/caregivers would be better accessed through community support agencies, which necessitated an extension of our sample population beyond the local school district.

In an attempt to obtain a representative sample from each alternative family composition, many contacts were made with known helping agencies and support groups within Chittenden and Washington counties. This initial search produced additional groups and individual contacts that proved to be important resources. Of the 83 surveys that were eventually sent out, 35 were returned, yielding a 42.2% rate of return.

One final point to clarify relates to the use of the term, "parent/caregiver" throughout this study. For the purpose of this study, whenever this term is used, it is referring only to parent/caregivers from alternative family compositions, and does not include traditional families (i.e. those with both biological parents present in the household, and one in which the parents are legally married).

Perspectives of School Personnel

Locating schools for the study proved to be a more complex task than originally expected. Our initial intent was to obtain the perspectives of both school personnel and parent/caregiver(s) from two demographically unique schools within the same district. As mentioned earlier, due to confidentiality and legal concerns it was determined that contacts with parent/caregiver(s) would need to be made independently of the chosen school(s). To maintain a level of direct comparison between school and family populations, the decision was made to select schools from within the same geographic regions as the family contacts (ie Chittenden and Washington counties). Realizing the demographic diversity within these counties, schools of varying size and location were chosen: One large urban school, one medium suburban school, and one smaller rural school.

A survey was developed in conjunction with the family survey, that allowed for direct comparison of perspectives on the four selected areas (see Appendix C). Efforts to avoid bias in question orientation included numerous screenings by school personnel and professionals in the field. School principals were found to be very willing to participate in the study, and assisted in facilitating survey distribution and collection. Of the 39 surveys distributed, 24 were returned, yielding a 61.5% rate of return.

Evaluation of Text, Curricula and School Contact Forms

As stated earlier, it was felt that a more objective probe into materials currently being used in schools was needed. Text samples at the third and fourth grade levels in the areas of health, reading and social studies were requested from the three schools and were selected by building principals. Methods of text analysis were guided by studies that emerged from the review of current literature (Britton & Lumpkin, 1983; Evans, 1982; Kealey, 1980). After reviewing these studies it was then determined that our text evaluation would focus on content related explicitly to human families, the frequency of terms that reflected family composition, and the nature of reference to traditional and non-traditional compositions (ie positive or negative). A form was then developed to assist in the evaluation of texts (see Appendix D). Sample texts were received from each school and a total of 8 texts from the three content areas mentioned above were reviewed.

Formal written curricula were requested from each school in the areas of health and social studies. When available, curricula were reviewed to determine the nature of content that related to family composition. Specifically, the inclusion and the nature of inclusion (positive or negative) of non-traditional families was the primary focus. A total of 5 curricula were reviewed (3 health and 2 social studies).

A sampling of school contact forms was obtained from each school. These were then analyzed according to the following four criteria to assess their incusiveness: Terms used in opening address, terms used to request signature, terms used in reference to student:caregiver relationship, and a general impression of inclusiveness. Sample forms were received from each school and a total of 13 forms were reviewed.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Due to the fact that this is a large pilot study, it was determined that the survey format would be the most effective means of obtaining information. Although this is true, it is also recognized that this format has inherent limitations, some of which are: The potential for misinterpretation or misunderstanding of questions by respondants, researcher misinterpretation of responses, limiting respondants to single sentence comments and restricting follow-up questions by researchers.

2. Disproportionate return rates between the various non-traditional family samples due to difficulty of access.

3. Due to the overall small size of the study, generalizations cannot be drawn. Instead, conclusions are based upon results as indicators of potential trends. Again, it is stated that this is a pilot study to be used as a baseline in further research.

4. Observations were not undertaken to verify the practices of educators (ie actual terms used when referring to family members) and the actual materials used.

DATA ANALYSIS AND SECTION-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

PARENT/CAREGIVER(S)

- PARENT/CAREGIVER(S) - SUMMARY
    - General Information
        - Raw Data
        - Discussion
        - Implications
        - Recommendations
    - School Curriculum and Materials
        - Raw Data
        - Discussion
        - Implications
        - Recommendations
    - Communication
        - Raw Data
        - Discussion
        - Implications
        - Recommendations
    - Attitudes of School Personnel
        - Raw Data
        - Discussion
        - Implications
        - Recommendations

- PARENT/CAREGIVER(S) - BY COMPOSITION
    - Step Families
        - Raw Data
        - Discussion
    - Single Parent (Mother Only)
        - Raw Data
        - Discussion
    - Single Parent (Father Only)
        - Raw Data
        - Discussion
    - Single Parent with Non-Parent Adult in the Home
        - Raw Data
        - Discussion
    - Foster/Adoptive Families
        - Raw Data
        - Discussion
    - Same Sex Families
        - Raw Data
        - Discussion

TEACHERS

TEACHERS - SUMMARY

Student Information
- Raw Data
- Discussion
- Implications
- Recommendations

School Curriculum and Materials
- Raw Data
- Discussion
- Implications
- Recommendations

Communication
- Raw Data
- Discussion
- Implications
- Recommendations

Perceptions of Family Compositions
- Raw Data
- Discussion
- Implications
- Recommendations

TEACHERS - BY SCHOOL

Large Urban School
- Raw Data
- Discussion

Medium Suburban School
- Raw Data
- Discussion

Small Rural School
- Raw Data
- Discussion

TEXTBOOKS, CURRICULA AND FORMS

TEXTBOOKS - SUMMARY

All Schools
- Raw Data
- Discussion
- Implications
- Recommendations

CURRICULA - SUMMARY

All Schools
- Raw Data
- Discussion
- Implications
- Recommendations

SCHOOL CONTACT FORMS

All Schools
- Raw Data
- Discussion
- Implications
- Recommendations

INTRODUCTION

Data analysis is presented within three broad sections: Parent/Caregiver(s); Teachers; and Textbooks, Curricula and Forms. Within each of these broad sections the raw data obtained through surveys and materials analyses is presented first, followed by a discussion of data, implications and recommendations for change, as viewed by the researchers.

Although 35 parent/caregiver and 24 teacher surveys were completed for this research, the number of responses presented for each question may not match the total number of individuals surveyed, due to the fact that in some situations respondants chose to answer twice (if the answer was situation-dependent), or chose not to answer at all.

Our initial intention was to obtain results exclusively from within an elementary school-age population (ie grades K-8). When all areas of research were concluded, it was found that 74% of students referred to by parent/caregivers were within our target grades; with 86% of families surveyed having children in elementary school. All of the teachers surveyed and all of the school materials were derived from elementary settings.

At this time, the researchers would like to take the opportunity to thank all those individuals that participated in the study, by either assisting in the contacts with the three target schools and the community service agencies, or completing the surveys.

Further appreciation is extended to the district administrator who initially sanctioned the research and greatly assisted in composing the surveys, to the three Principals of the target schools, and to the educators who were asked to analyze their own beliefs and practices. As with most research, once an understanding and description of the current situation has been established, there are usually suggested ways to improve and therefore ultimately "change". Even under such a premise, these participants willingly accepted the opportunity to be involved. Their openness to potential critical analysis was commendable. With this type of attitude and openness to change, our schools appear to be moving in a progressive, balanced manner.

Of equal importance was the information received from parent/caregivers, who were contacted through both informal networking and community service agencies. Sincere thanks are extended to those individuals who facilitated the contacts, and those who completed the survey.

Due to confidentiality, these people cannot be named, but their efforts are greatly appreciated. Without their cooperation and willingness to participate in an honest and sincere way, this study would not have been feasible.

PARENT/CAREGIVER(S)

PARENT/CAREGIVER(S) SUMMARY

General Information

Raw Data

1. Family Compositions of Respondants: (Total Respondants = 35)

Both Natural Parents __0_

Step Parents __3_

Single Parent (mother only) _14__

Single Parent (father only) __1_

Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home __4_

Foster/Adoptive Parents __7_

Same Sex Parents __6_

Non-Parent Relative __0_

Other (please specify) __0_

2. Is your child currently attending public school?__yes_

What is their grade level? K-4: 22 5-8: 26 9-12: 18

3. Do school personnel know your family composition?

Yes _29__ No __1_ Don't Know __5_

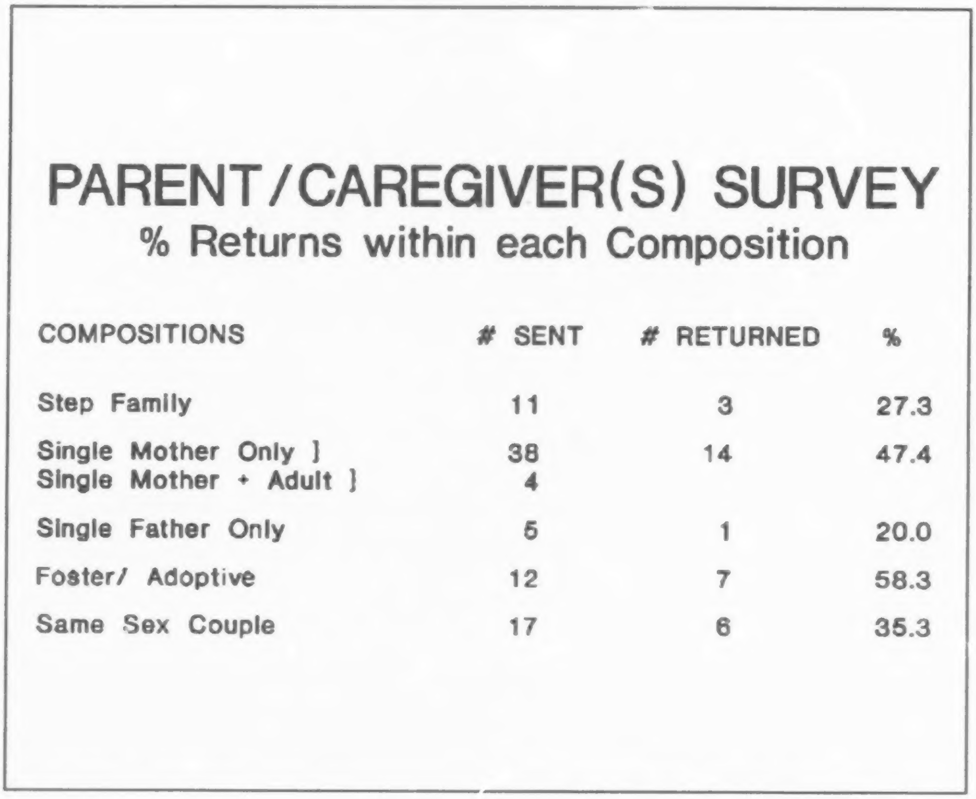
4. Do you think the school should know about your family composition?

Yes _29_ No _1__ No Opinion __5_

Summary of Comments: Almost all respondants stated that their child(ren) benefits from having school personnel informed about their family circumstances: To avoid insensitive remarks, to enable teachers to be inclusive, and to be better placed to deal with situation-specific problems were frequently cited as reasons for this response.

Discussion

As stated in the Methodology, the number of surveys distributed to parent/caregivers within each of the identified family compositions was largely determined by accessibility to those groups. The rates of return among the various compositions varied widely; the breakdown by composition is summarized in the table below:

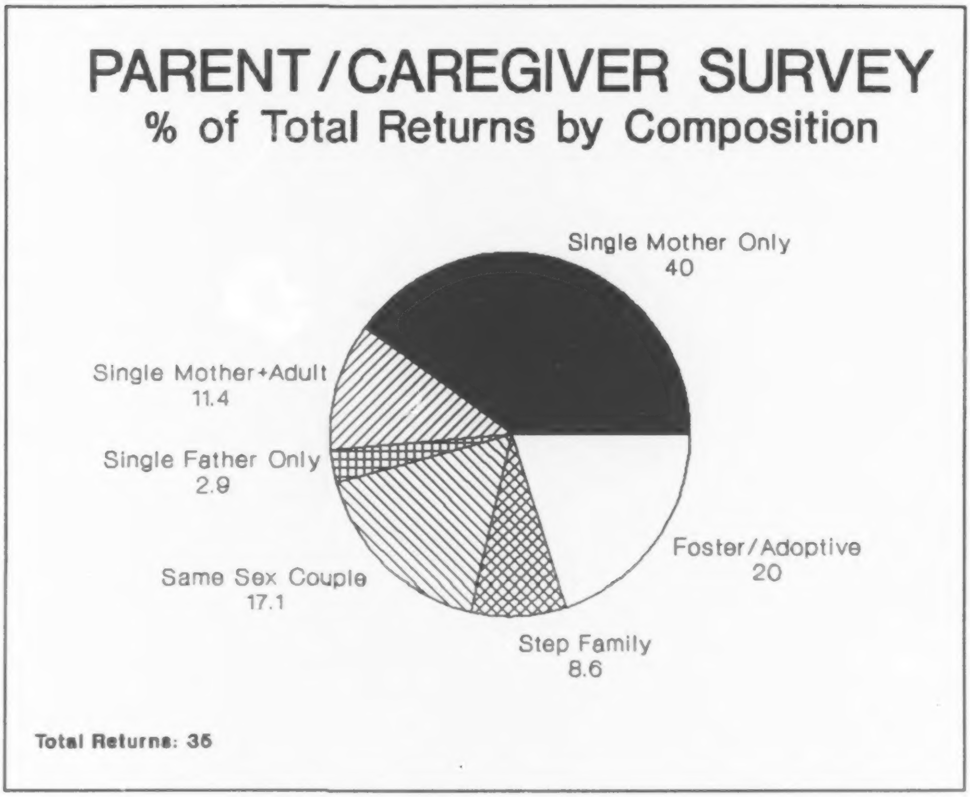


PARENT/CAREGIVER(S) SURVEY

% Returns within each Composition

COMPOSITIONS	# SENT	# RETURNED	%
Step Family	11	3	27.3
Single Mother Only]	38	14	47.4
Single Mother + Adult]	4		
Single Father Only	5	1	20.0
Foster/ Adoptive	12	7	58.3
Same Sex Couple	17	6	35.3

As a result of the variance in accessibility and rate of return among the various family compositions, the total sample population from this section of the research consists of an uneven distribution of respondants, as is represented in the following chart:



The majority of responses came from single parent families with the mother as the head of the household, which is congruent with both national and Vermont statistics with regard to the breakdown of alternative family compositions (single parent [mother only] families make up the largest percentage of alternative families). The researchers felt that the step-family composition was under-represented in this study, since step-families make up a larger percentage of alternative compositions than was represented here, and that same sex families were over-represented due to the fact that they are a much smaller percentage of the population.

All respondants had children attending public school, and the majority of their children were in elementary school (86%). Almost all respondants stated that school personnel knew their family composition and that this was important information for them to have.

Implications

With 83% of respondants stating that they do think teachers should be aware of students' family compositions, the main implication derived from this section is the need for and benefits of teachers and school personnel being fully aware of the family compositions of their students. Some of the benefits stated by parent/caregivers were avoidance of insensitive remarks, enablement of teachers to be more inclusive, and allowing teachers to be better placed to deal with situation-specific problems.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that teachers develop an inclusive and non-threatening means by which to solicit important information with regard to students' living arrangements and family compositions. This should be completed at the beginning of every school year and updated as changes occur (as indicated by parent/caregivers). (See Appendix F for a draft example form).

2. Future research in this field should include views from a traditional (2 biological parent) family composition sample; and the percentage of respondants from the various family compositions should match the family demographic profile and statistics for the geographical area being studied.

School Curricula and Materials

Raw Data

5. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your child uses?

Yes _5__ No _13__ Don't Know _17__

b. The other school materials your child is exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc)?

Yes _10__ No _10__ Don't Know _15__

c. Classroom discussion?

Yes _12__ No _5__ Sometimes _2__ Don't Know _16_

d. School library books?

Yes _22__ No _1__ Don't Know _12__

6. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

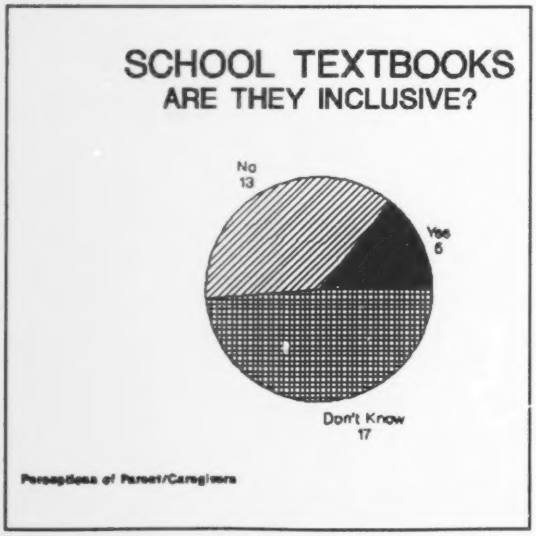
a. School materials? Yes _33__ No __1_ No Opinion __1_

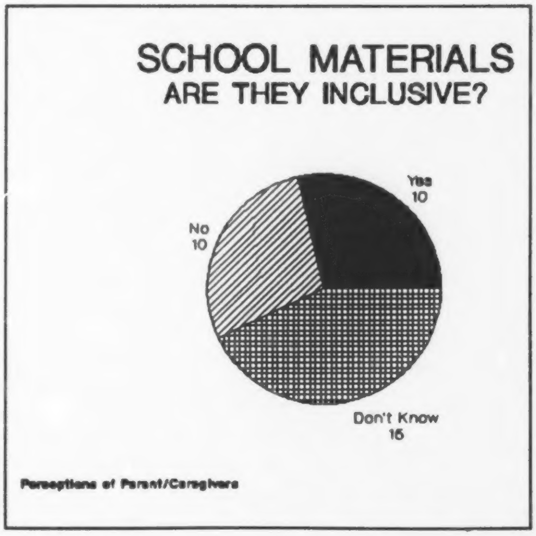
b. Classroom discussion? Yes _33__ No __2_ No Opinion __0_

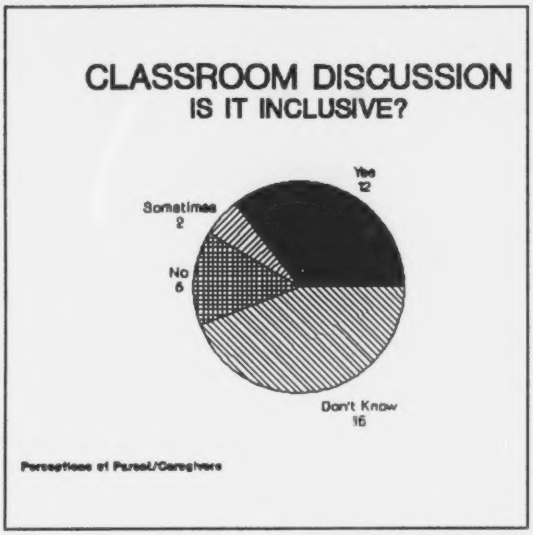
Summary of Comments: Overwhelmingly, respondants advocated for the (positive) inclusion of alternative family compositions in school materials and classroom discussion. Most often, this response was to prevent their children from feeling isolated or in some way, "abnormal". Proactive references to teaching acceptance of diversity amongst children were also common.

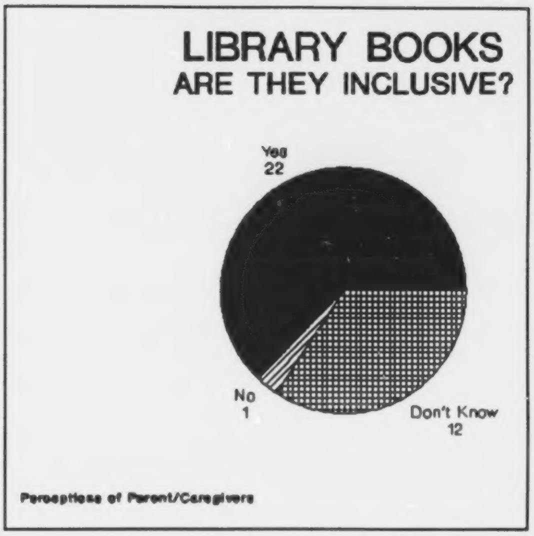
Discussion

Overall, parent/caregivers did not appear to be aware of school curricula and materials used in their children's classrooms. They did indicate a higher awareness of the textbooks being used and in this area many felt that these books were not inclusive of a variety of family compositions. There appeared an even distribution of opinions on other school materials, with some indicating that materials were inclusive and others indicating that they were not. Still, many were not aware of the materials being used in their children's school. It seems that classroom discussion is viewed as being more inclusive of alternative family compositions, yet once again many respondants did not know what was being presented in classrooms. The majority of parent/caregivers felt that school library books were inclusive, but at the same time, approximately one third of respondants were unaware of their content:

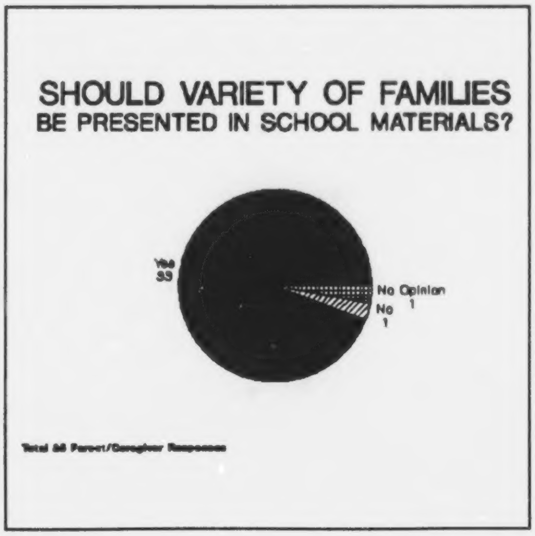


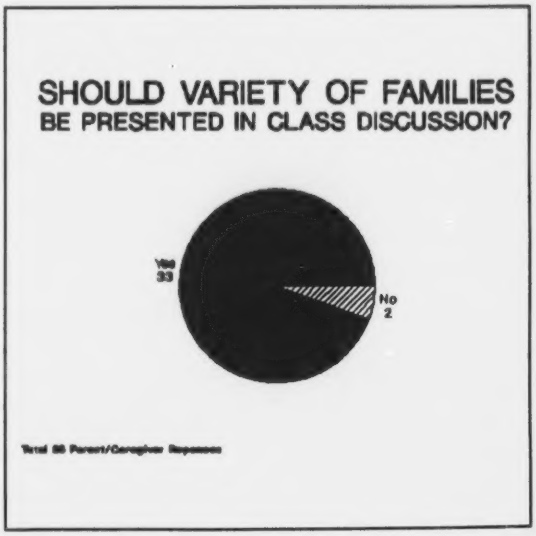






Overwhelmingly, respondants advocated for the positive inclusion of alternative family compositions in school materials and classroom discussion. Most often, their reasons for advocating a more inclusive curriculum were to prevent children from feeling isolated or "abnormal".





Implications

The fact that a very high proportion of parent/caregivers are not aware of classroom-based activities has strong implications for the need for increased parent/caregiver involvement in both school activities and decisions that center upon school curriculum and materials. Textbooks are clearly perceived as being exclusive of alternative families, which implies that about 40% of students' families are not represented in school-based texts. As mentioned earlier, the absence of a child's family lifestyle from his/her school texts may have serious repercussions on his/her self image and emotional development.

The low number of informed parent/caregivers and the perceived exclusive nature of school curricula and materials, coupled with the overwhelmingly high desire of parent/caregivers for inclusivity in such materials are strong evidence of the need for change. Current classroom materials are not providing the frame of reference that parent/caregivers want for their children.

Recommendations

1. The apparent lack of parent/caregiver awareness and/or involvement in school leads to a strong recommendation for increased efforts by both school personnel and family members to assume more active roles in bridging this gap.

2. Parent/caregivers and school personnel need to drive the content of textbooks and materials used, rather than allowing publishing companies to do so. Instead of basing decisions upon what is available, representative committees (made up of both parent/caegivers and school personnel) should be the determiners of textbook content and classroom materials.

3. It is recommended that school libraries continue to build upon their existing stocks of inclusive books and reference materials.

4. Due to the apparent mismatch between present practices and materials in use in classrooms today with regard to inclusive family representation, and what is desired by parent/caregivers, increased parent/caregiver involvement is highly recommended in school activities that center upon curricula and materials.

Communication

Raw Data

7. Do you feel that school registration and health forms allow for your family composition to be included (e.g. is there space on the forms for a non-parent to respond)?

Yes __8_ No __21_ No Opinion __6_

8. Summary of suggestions offered for making these forms more sensitive to alternative family compositions:

Avoid skewing forms toward one particular parent, include space for alternative family compositions, avoid use of the term "parent", include space for information the caregiver wants to provide, include space for more than one address/ addressee, space for custody situation, update forms regularly.

9. How would you describe the quality of your communication with the school?

Excellent _14__ Adequate _20__ Unsatisfactory __3_

10. If you are unsatisfied with your communication with the school, do you feel it is related to school personnel opinions of your family composition?

Yes __3_ No __16_ No Opinion __10_

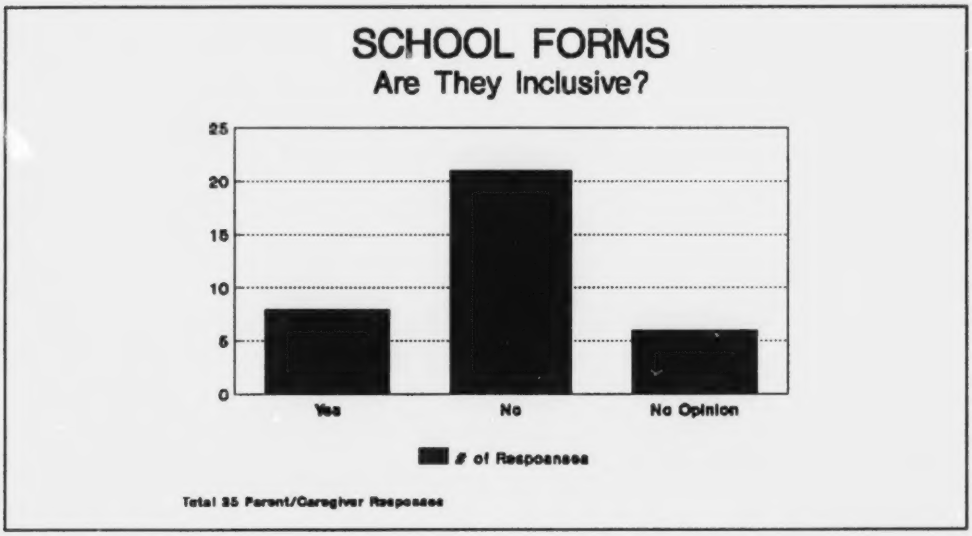
11. When communication (such as phone calls, letters, permission slips for field trips) does occur between school and home, do you feel you are being addressed in an acceptable way?

Yes __25_ No __7_ No Opinion __2_ Sometimes __1_

Summary of Comments: A majority of positive responses were recorded, with some stating very clear support being received from school personnel. However, some noted assumptions of a two parent household and feelings that some teachers were judgmental of their circumstances.

Discussion

Respondants clearly stated that communication between school and home was satisfactory and that they were being addressed in an acceptable way. Few believed that any dissatisfaction they had with the school's personal communication was directly related to their family composition. However, even with this, the vast majority did not feel that the school registration and health forms were inclusive or allowed for their family composition to be accurately represented, as can be seen in the bar graph below:



Many offered suggestions for improving the forms to make them more inclusive of alternative lifestyles:

- Include space for alternative family compositions.
- Avoid use of the term, "parent".
- Include space for information the parent/caregiver(s) want to provide.
- Include space for more than one address/addressee.
- Update forms regularly.

Implications

School personnel appear to be communicating with parent/caregivers in a satisfactory manner. Home-school communication is evidently not an area of concern for the parent/caregivers surveyed and it appears that educators are being sensitive to the individual needs of alternative families.

School contact forms are clearly not changing with the needs of today's families, as perceived by parent/caregivers. Implications of having forms that are not inclusive are that schools may not have the information they require to best serve a child's needs, and that schools may be alienating a large proportion of the parent/caregiver population.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that educators continue to improve the inclusive nature of their communication with students' families, and continue to change (as needed) with today's ever-changing family. One helpful suggestion may be to ask the child how they refer to the adult(s) in their home - they are the experts.

2. It is strongly recommended that schools revise their existing contact forms (eg registration and health forms) to make them more inclusive of diverse family compositions, and commit to updating them regularly (See Appendix G for draft example form).

Attitudes of School Personnel

Raw Data

12. How would you describe the attitudes of school personnel towards your family composition?

Positive __20_ Negative __7_ Indifferent __10_ Don't Know_2

Summary of Comments: Again, many of the responses recorded positive interactions with school personnel. There were references again to value judgements being made about family compositions, and an observed bias in favor of traditional families.

13. Do you feel that school personnel need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents __2_
Step Parents _10__
Single Parent (mother only) _13__
Single Parent (father only) _11__
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home _16__
Foster/Adoptive Parents _14__
Same Sex Parents _17__
Non-Parent Relative __9_
Other (please specify) (Different Cultures)__2________

Summary of Comments: Numerous comments centered upon the need for greater acceptance/awareness of alternative compositions, and an informed understanding of the problems/benefits particular to those situations.

14. Has your child ever been affected by comments at school about your family's composition?

Yes __9_ No __17_ Don't Know __9_

Summary of Comments: A large number of comments referred to a general negative attitude towards alternative family compositions, rather than to specific comments. Students' peers were often cited as those responsible for comments.

15. Do you feel that school personnel link your child's potential school performance to your family composition?

Yes __9_ No __18_ Sometimes __1_ Don't Know __7_

Summary of Comments: A high number of respondants (35%) suggested that their children are not expected to be high achievers as a direct result of their family composition.

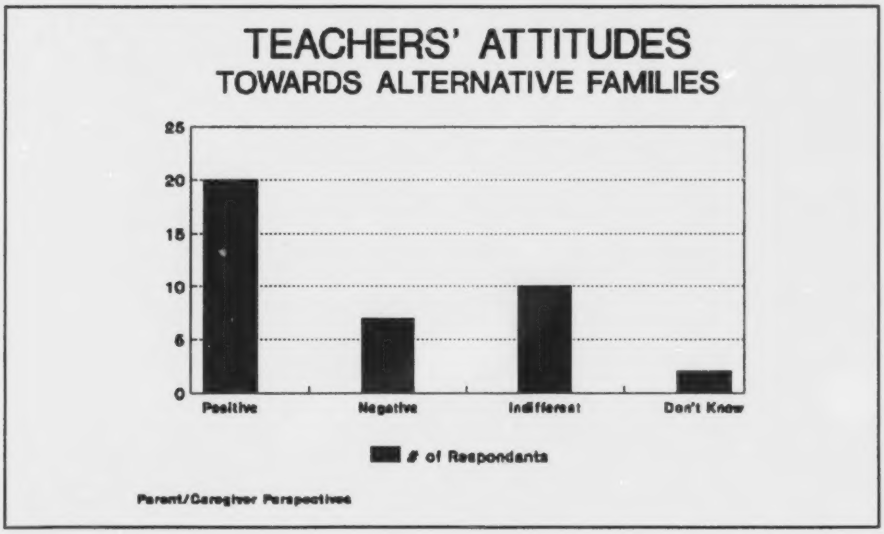
16. Do the school personnel assume that your child's mother and father are both in the home (for example, by asking your child to interview mom and dad for a homework assignment)?

Summary of Comments: 12 respondants stated that teachers did assume that both parents were in the home by referring to female adults as "Mrs." and by directed assignments involving a specific parent.

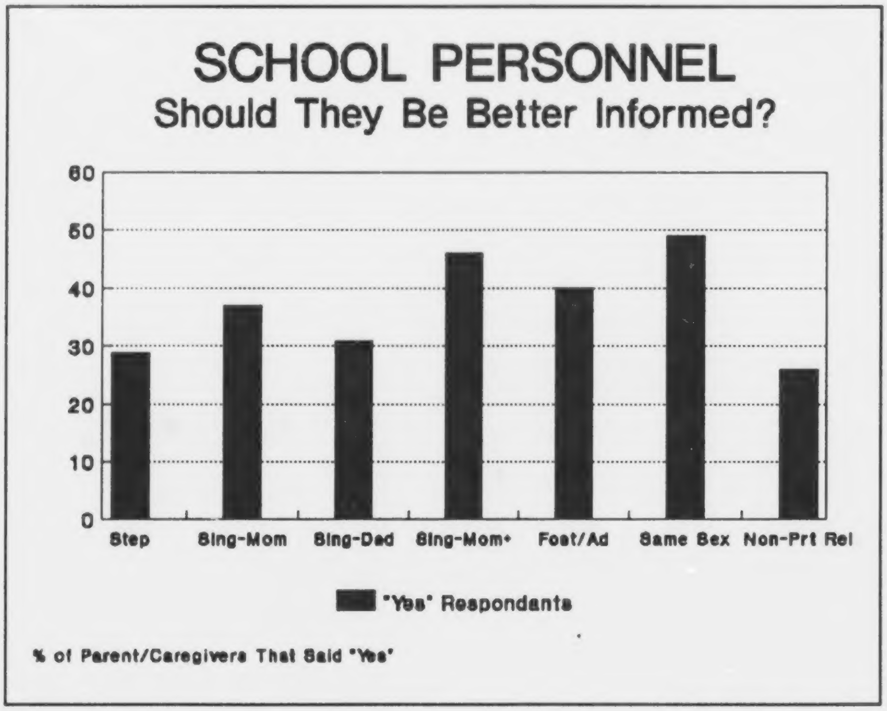
Discussion

Respondants presented very divided views of the attitudes of school personnel to their respective family compositions. The overall impression gained from this section of the survey though, is that a child's family composition does impact upon the way they are perceived by both school personnel and by peers.

Approximately 50% of respondants stated that school personnel presented a positive attitude toward their family composition. However, almost 20% indicated that negative attitudes prevailed and 26% stated an indifference by school personnel. There were also references made to the presence of value judgments and stereotypical views of certain family compositions, and an observed bias in favor of traditional family lifestyles:

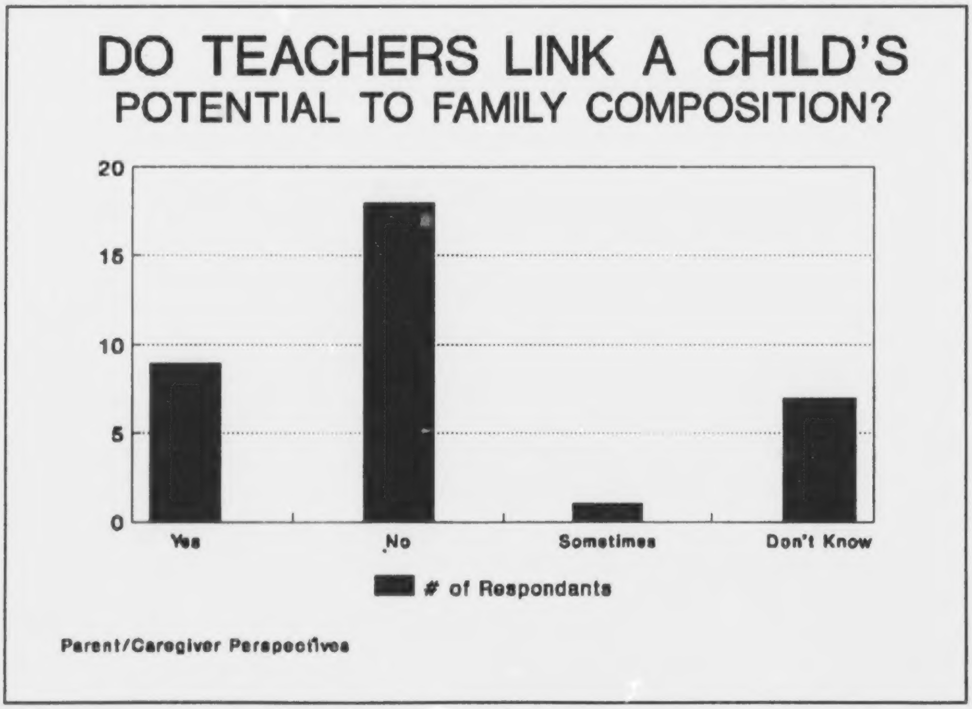


Over one third of respondants stated that teachers did assume that both parents were in the home by referring to female adults as "Mrs." and by directed assignments involving a specific parent. Respondants indicated the clear need for school personnel to have more information about alternative families, particularly same sex couples and single parents with non-parent adults living in the home (see chart below). Comments suggested that a presentation of the benefits and challenges unique to each composition would foster an increased acceptance and awareness of diversity and alternative families.



One in four respondants indicated that their children had been affected by comments at school about their family's composition. A further 25% did not know if such comments had been made. A large number of statements referred to a general negative attitude towards alternative family compositions, rather than to specific comments. Students' peers were often cited as those responsible for comments.

Only half of the respondants could definitely state that school personnel did not link their child's potential school performance to their family composition (see chart below). A high number of respondants commented that their children are not expected to be high achievers, as a direct result of their family composition.



Implications

A major finding from the responses received in this section is that a child's family composition does impact upon the way he/she is perceived by school personnel, which has serious implications for educators' biases towards student potential. Teacher expectations, either high or low, that are projected onto a student based on his/her family composition have potential to be detrimental or harmful to that child (Good & Brophy, 1988).

Linked to this issue is the perceived presence of teacher partiality toward traditional family structures and the harboring of stereotypical images of alternative family compositions. Aside from possible effects on student performance, this also raises the possibility of fostering a school environment which is not accepting of diversity. References made in surveys to peer intolerance of a child's living situation would continue to result from perpetuation of such a climate by educators. This has implications for the need to increase students' awareness and acceptance of diversity through curriculum development and education, which again leads to the teacher's need to be better informed and non-judgmental.

The need for teachers to be better informed and educated were continuing themes throughout this section. Lack of awareness may manifest itself through inappropriate assumptions being made about the student's family, such as referring to all female adults as "Mrs.". Incidents like this may come from a lack of awareness and clearly do not enhance positive home-school relations.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that teachers take great care to avoid projecting high or low expectations of a child based upon his/her family composition and that they allow children to develop independently of their family. If possible, there needs to be a high level of awareness about a child's family and home circumstances without linking this to their academic potential.

2. It is recommended that educators continuously examine their own assumptions and biases with regard to the various family compositions that exist. As role models for students, teachers have a responsibility to establish and maintain a safe, accepting climate for all (Bozzett, 1987).

3. It is recommended that schools enhance students' awareness and acceptance of diversity through curriculum development in education.

4. It is highly recommended that school administrators provide, and teachers actively seek further information about alternative family compositions, from both professionals in the field and from families themselves. As educators become more comfortable interacting with diverse family situations, it may help those families - particularly children - become more accepting of their circumstances.

PARENT/CAREGIVER(S) - BY COMPOSITION

Step Families

Raw Data

I. GENERAL INFORMATION (Total Respondants = 3)

2. Childrens' grade level: K-4: 1 5-8: 4 9-12: 1

3. Do school personnel know your family composition?

Yes _2_ No _0_ Don't Know _1_

4. Do you think the school should know about your family composition?

Yes _2_ No _0_ No Opinion _1_

Comments: "The family is the most important influence on the child's life, for better or worse, and will bear an impact on school success. Teachers can be helped in their work by understanding family composition and its effects on kids."

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

5. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your child uses ?

Yes _0_ No _0_ Don't Know _3_

b. The other school materials your child is exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc) ?

Yes _1_ No _0_ Don't Know _2_

c. Classroom discussion ?

Yes _0_ No _0_ Don't Know _3_

d. School library books ?

Yes _1_ No _0_ Don't Know _2_

6. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials ? Yes _2_ No _1_ No opinion _0_

b. Classroom discussion ? Yes _1_ No _2_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "It helps kids in step-families to feel less different and more mainstreamed."

"It depends on the purpose--many kids don't know what to keep confidential."

"Every child has a mother and a father, and ideally should have the benefit of growing under the loving care of both. Rather than aiming towards schools glorifying single parent homes, non-parent adult homes, etc., I believe families are better served by society looking for ways to strengthen traditional families."

III. COMMUNICATION

7. Do you feel that school registration and health forms allow for your family composition to be included (e.g. is there space on the forms for a non-parent to respond)?

Yes _0_ No _3_ No opinion _0_

8. Do you have any suggestions for making these forms more sensitive to your family composition?

Include space for alternative family compositions. Step-parents need to feel legitimate too. The forms also appear skewed towards mothers, disregarding the father.

9. How would you describe the quality of your communication with the school?

Excellent _1_ Adequate _2_ Unsatisfactory _0_

10. If you are dissatisfied with your communication with the school, do you feel it is related to school personnel opinions of your family composition?

Yes _0_ No _1_ No opinion _2_

11. When communication (such as phone calls, letters, permission for field trips) does occur between school and home, do you feel you are being addressed in an acceptable way?

Yes _2_ No _0_ No opinion _1_

IV. ATTITUDES OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

12. How would you describe the attitudes of school personnel towards your family composition?

Positive _2_ Negative _0_ Indifferent _1_

13. Do you feel that school personnel need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents	__0_
Step Parents	__1_
Single Parent (mother only)	__0_
Single Parent (father only)	__1_
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home	__0_
Foster/Adoptive Parents	__0_
Same Sex Parents	__0_
Non-Parent Relative	__0_
Other (please specify)	__0_

14. Has you child ever been affected by comments at school about your family's composition?

Yes _0_ No _3_ No Opinion _0_

15. Do you feel that school personnel link your child's potential school performance to your family composition?

Yes _1_ No _2_ No Opinion _0_

16. Do the school personnel assume that your child's mother and father are both in the home (for example, by asking your child to interview mom or dad for a homework assignment)?

Yes _0_ No _3_ Don't Know _0_

17. Additional Comments: "I believe we need to emphasize the strengthening of traditional, nuclear families...Promoting all sorts of other arrangements may help a kid feel better about his situation, but it belies the fact that he needs, intrinsically, his Mom and Dad."

Discussion

In the course of searching for contacts within this family composition, researchers found step families to have few support groups and little organization, possibly due to their perceived lack of need, which is supported by society (since this appears to be a well established, high functioning group that is closely linked to traditional families). Through the contacts identified during this study, 11 surveys were distributed and 3 were completed, yielding a 27.3% rate of return and comprising 8.6% of the total number of surveys that make up this study.

Overall, the findings of this particular group are congruent with those drawn from all parent/caregiver surveys, in the sense that they feel it is important for schools to know what their family composition is; that they are not very aware of curriculum content; and that school contact forms are definitely not inclusive of alternative families.

Although this is true, a general impression gained from the responses and comments recorded is that this group allies itself closely to the traditional family composition: Two "parents" are present in the home and refer to themselves as "Mom and Dad". Although they do fall into the alternative family definition, step families seem to be generally accepted by society and somewhat cautious about public education promoting other alternative families. Two of the three respondants commented that they did not feel it was important to have a variety of family compositions represented in classroom discussion and there was little perceived need to educate school personnel about alternative family lifestyles.

Single Parent (mother Only)

Raw Data

I. GENERAL INFORMATION (Total Respondants = 14)

2. Childrens' grade level: K-4: 12 5-8: 4 9-12: 5

3. Do school personnel know your family composition?

Yes _12_ No _1_ Don't Know _1_

4. Do you think the school should know about your family composition?

Yes _10_ No _0_ No Opinion _4_

Comments: "My childrens' father has been absent for over 6 years. They feel hurt when the school asks to speak to their father."

"I find the school assumes I am married and most kids have two parents in the home."

"They should know who to call."

"They can provide support for the child and parent--on the other hand, they may view this negatively and label the child, 'from a broken home'."

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

5. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your child uses ?

Yes _0_ No _8_ Don't Know _6_

b. The other school materials your child is exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc) ?

Yes _2_ No _5_ Don't Know _7_

c. Classroom discussion ?

Yes _4_ No _4_ Don't Know _6_

d. School library books ?

Yes _10_ No _0_ Don't Know _4_

6. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials ? Yes _13_ No _0_ No opinion _1_

b. Classroom discussion ? Yes _14_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "I think that a child should know that families do not always consist of a mom, dad, child, and that there is nothing wrong with that."

"Yes, so that my kids know that they are not alone."

"Yes, so that all kids can feel normal."

"I believe the nuclear family should not be shown as the norm, because it is not, and it makes kids from mixed families feel excluded."

"To only present the "typical family" is as wrong as telling our kids fairy tales when they are in their teens."

III. COMMUNICATION

7. Do you feel that school registration and health forms allow for your family composition to be included (e.g. is there space on the forms for a non-parent to respond)?

Yes _4_ No _7_ No opinion _3_

8. Do you have any suggestions for making these forms more sensitive to your family composition?

Add an essay to the form for parents to add anything they feel is necessary...This essay should be offered every year. Instead of parent's name, they could put primary caregiver. Include secondary guardians and relationships.

9. How would you describe the quality of your communication with the school?

Excellent _7_ Adequate _6_ Unsatisfactory _2_

Comments: "I have to push for adequate communication and go to the top."

"Excellent because I work very hard at it."

10. If you are dissatisfied with your communication with the school, do you feel it is related to school personnel opinions of your family composition?

Yes _2_ No _7_ No opinion _5_

11. When communication (such as phone calls, letters, permission for field trips) does occur between school and home, do you feel you are being addressed in an acceptable way?

Yes _9_ No _4_ No opinion _1_

Comments: "..because I am a mother, I am automatically addressed as "Mrs..." and asked where my husband is on school/parent events--very tactless."

IV. ATTITUDES OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

12. How would you describe the attitudes of school personnel towards your family composition?

Positive _7_ Negative _5_ Indifferent _4_

Comments: "From the teacher, I have received good attitudes. From the Principal and other parents I am perceived negatively."

"Some do have a shaded opinion and it shows. They have a stereotypical view of single parent households and it is negative."

"They have been extremely supportive--willing to share information and listen to me."

13. Do you feel that school personnel need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents	__1_
Step Parents	__5_
Single Parent (mother only)	__7_
Single Parent (father only)	__4_
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home	__5_
Foster/Adoptive Parents	__4_
Same Sex Parents	__6_
Non-Parent Relative	__3_
Other (please specify)	__0_

Comments: "(They) shouldn't treat families differently."

"They need to help single moms."

"Sometimes my boyfriend is left out."

"Some teachers are judgemental and behind the times..some are very with it and kind."

14. Has you child ever been affected by comments at school about your family's composition?

Yes _2_ No _8_ No Opinion _5_

15. Do you feel that school personnel link your child's potential school performance to your family composition?

Yes _3_ No _7_ No Opinion _1_ Don't Know _3_

Comments: "Yes, at least sometimes. My child was in a discussion group and expressed what she wanted to be and the guidance counselor told her to reconsider because it would take a lot of schooling that would cost a lot of money."

16. Do the school personnel assume that your child's mother and father are both in the home (for example, by asking your child to interview mom or dad for a homework assignment)?

Yes _9_ No _6_ Don't Know _1_

Comments: "They continue to call me Mrs..."

"They continue to ask to talk to the childrens' father."

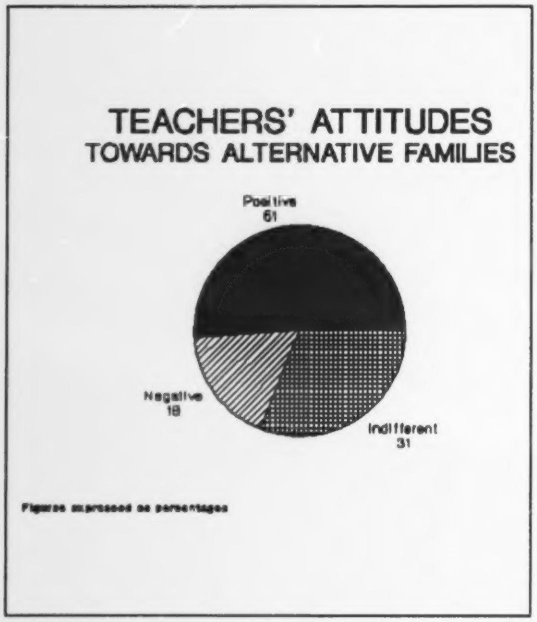
17. Additional Comments: "Now that I am thinking about it, I will go to the Principal and discuss how we can change the forms."

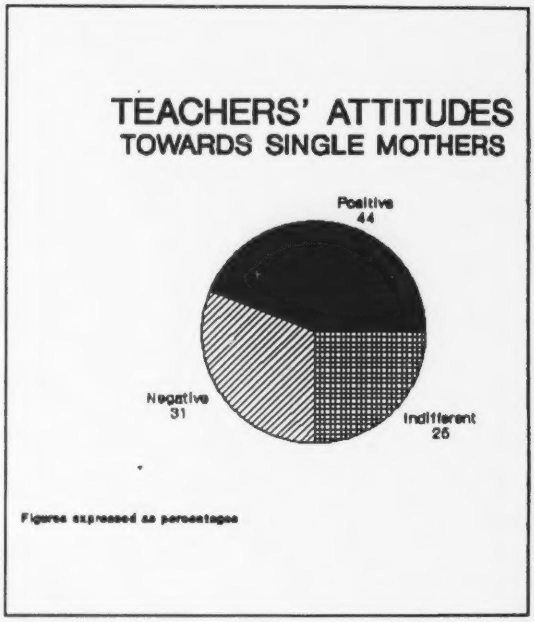
"Caregivers need to take a more active role in making teachers feel more comfortable with alternative family compositions."

Discussion

In attempting to establish contacts within this group, researchers did not find any organized or formal single mother groups with the sole purpose of providing support. Informal networks appeared to be in place, such as home-based social gatherings and friends in support of friends. The formal groups that were contacted appeared to have an educating function in the areas of parenting skills, job skills and providing services to the entire family. Overall, the professional facilitators of these groups were resistant to our contacts, possibly due to the perceived need to protect their clients' interests. With the assistance of a few of the formally organized groups and informal networks, 38 surveys were distributed and 14 were returned from this targeted family composition, as well as four additional surveys that comprised the single parent plus adult in the home group, separated out for this research. The rate of return within this group was 37%, which constitutes 40% of the total parent/caregiver surveys received.

Respondants overwhelmingly endorsed the school knowing their family composition, yet cautioned against abuse of that information in the sense that educators may view this family composition negatively and label the children, "from broken homes". This may be a very real situation for many children, since 31% of respondants from this composition described the attitudes of school personnel toward their family composition as negative, compared to only 18% of the total parent/caregiver respondants that indicated the same opinion (see charts below). A recurrent theme throughout all sections of these surveys is that single mothers are viewed as being more in need of and dependent on assistance from social institutions. According to the single mothers surveyed, these views appear to be held by educators as well as some single mothers themselves.





The implication from this is that children from single mother households function within lower teacher expectations and a prevailing perception of being more "at risk" than students from traditional families. Support for this statement can be found in the following comment from one survey: "My child was in a discussion group and expressed what she wanted to be and the guidance counselor told her to reconsider because it would take a lot of schooling and that would cost a lot of money".

Almost 30% of respondants felt that they were not being addressed in an acceptable way by school personnel. From the comments written, the sense is that assumptions are being made that two parents are in the home and that the mothers are functioning in more traditional roles. A relatively high proportion of respondants advocated for a greater awareness by educators with regard to all of the alternative family compositions.

Respondants in this category clearly indicated that textbooks were not inclusive of a variety of family compositions, but that school library books were. Significantly, a much higher percentage of respondants from within this family composition than any other, believed that classroom discussion was exclusive in the presentation of "family" (30% versus 14% of total parent/ caregiver respondants). Almost exclusively, respondants felt that a variety of family compositions should be represented in school materials and classroom discussion, with numerous supporting comments: "I think that a child should know that families do not always consist of a mom, dad, child and that there is nothing wrong with that." "I believe that the (traditional) nuclear family should not be shown as the norm."

Single Parent (Father Only)

Raw Data

I. GENERAL INFORMATION (Total Respondants = 1)

2. Childrens' grade level: K-4: 1 5-8: 2 9-12: 0

3. Do school personnel know your family composition?

Yes _1_ No _0_ Don't Know _0_

4. Do you think the school should know about your family composition?

Yes _1_ No _0_ No Opinion _0_

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

5. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your child uses ?

Yes _0_ No _0_ Don't Know _1_

b. The other school materials your child is exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc) ?

Yes _0_ No _0_ Don't Know _1_

c. Classroom discussion ?

Yes _0_ No _0_ Don't Know _1_

d. School library books ?

Yes _0_ No _0_ Don't Know _1_

6. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials ? Yes _1_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

b. Classroom discussion ? Yes _1_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "...My children should not feel odd or alone. Non-traditional families are numerous and not abnormal. That truth should be reflected in childrens' learning experiences."

III. COMMUNICATION

7. Do you feel that school registration and health forms allow for your family composition to be included (e.g. is there space on the forms for a non-parent to respond)?

Yes _0_ No _1_ No opinion _0_

8. Do you have any suggestions for making these forms more sensitive to your family composition?

No comments.

9. How would you describe the quality of your communication with the school?

Excellent _0_ Adequate _1_ Unsatisfactory _0_

No Comments.

10. If you are dissatisfied with your communication with the school, do you feel it is related to school personnel opinions of your family composition?

Yes _0_ No _1_ No opinion _0_

11. When communication (such as phone calls, letters, permission for field trips) does occur between school and home, do you feel you are being addressed in an acceptable way?

Yes _1_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

No Comments.

IV. ATTITUDES OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

12. How would you describe the attitudes of school personnel towards your family composition?

Positive _0_ Negative _1_ Indifferent _0_

Comments: "They have referred to the negative impact of divorce on children."

13. Do you feel that school personnel need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents __0_
Step Parents __1_
Single Parent (mother only) __0_
Single Parent (father only) __1_
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home __0_
Foster/Adoptive Parents __0_
Same Sex Parents __0_
Non-Parent Relative __0_
Other (please specify) __0_

No Comments.

14. Has you child ever been affected by comments at school about your family's composition?

Yes _0_ No _0_ No Opinion _1_

15. Do you feel that school personnel link your child's potential school performance to your family composition?

Yes _1_ No _0_ No Opinion _0_ Don't Know _0_

Comments: "Yes, they say so."

16. Do the school personnel assume that your child's mother and father are both in the home (for example, by asking your child to interview mom or dad for a homework assignment)?

No comments.

Discussion

Overall, single fathers in the counties canvassed were found to be a small group and were not yet highly visible. Although support programs appear to be somewhat available to single fathers, researchers found them difficult to access and after numerous attempts no formal avenues were found. The one respondant in this composition was contacted via informal networking--friend of a friend. In anticipation of this respondant's ability/willingness to access other single fathers in the region, 5 surveys were sent out to him, but still only one was returned, yielding a 20% return rate and comprising 2.9% of the entire study.

Clearly with only one respondant in this section, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from the raw data. Some similarites to the summarized totals of all compositions were that the respondant felt it was important for school personnel to know a child's family composition, that there was a lack of awareness of school curriculum and materials used with indications of the importance of representing a variety of family compositions in such materials, and that communication was satisfactory. Unlike the summarized totals of all compositions, this respondant indicated that school personnel presented negative attitudes towards his family composition, citing teacher comments regarding the negative impact of divorce on his children.

Single Parent with Non-Parent Adult in the Home

Raw Data

I. GENERAL INFORMATION (Total Respondants = 4)

2. Childrens' grade level: K-4: 3 5-8: 4 9-12: 1

3. Do school personnel know your family composition?

Yes _4_ No _0_ Don't Know _0_

4. Do you think the school should know about your family composition?

Yes _4_ No _0_ No Opinion _0_

Comments: "I want my child's teacher to mention non-traditional families."

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

5. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your child uses ?

Yes _0_ No _1_ Don't Know _3_

b. The other school materials your child is exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc) ?

Yes _1_ No _1_ Don't Know _2_

c. Classroom discussion ?

Yes _3_ No _0_ Don't Know _1_

d. School library books ?

Yes _3_ No _0_ Don't Know _1_

6. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials ? Yes _4_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

b. Classroom discussion ? Yes _4_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "The more diversity children see, the more accepting they will be and the more comfortable they will feel with their family composition."

III. COMMUNICATION

7. Do you feel that school registration and health forms allow for your family composition to be included (e.g. is there space on the forms for a non-parent to respond)?

Yes _1_ No _3_ No opinion _0_

8. Do you have any suggestions for making these forms more sensitive to your family composition?

They should ask for other persons the child considers family. Personal interviews would be helpful.

9. How would you describe the quality of your communication with the school?

Excellent _0_ Adequate _3_ Unsatisfactory _1_

No Comments.

10. If you are dissatisfied with your communication with the school, do you feel it is related to school personnel opinions of your family composition?

Yes _1_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

11. When communication (such as phone calls, letters, permission for field trips) does occur between school and home, do you feel you are being addressed in an acceptable way?

Yes _3_ No _1_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "The non-custodial parent should get information."

"Most correspondances addressed, "Dear Parent"."

IV. ATTITUDES OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

12. How would you describe the attitudes of school personnel towards your family composition?

Positive _2_ Negative _1_ Indifferent _1_

Comments: "It varies from teacher to teacher. In the younger grades, teachers get more involved."

13. Do you feel that school personnel need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents	__0_
Step Parents	__0_
Single Parent (mother only)	__1_
Single Parent (father only)	__1_
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home	__2_
Foster/Adoptive Parents	__2_
Same Sex Parents	__3_
Non-Parent Relative	__2_
Other (please specify)	__0_

Comments: "A lot of this needs to be done by families themselves."

14. Has you child ever been affected by comments at school about your family's composition?

Yes _1_ No _1_ No Opinion _2_

15. Do you feel that school personnel link your child's potential school performance to your family composition?

Yes _1_ No _1_ No Opinion _0_ Don't Know _2_

16. Do the school personnel assume that your child's mother and father are both in the home (for example, by asking your child to interview mom or dad for a homework assignment)?

No comments.

17. Additional Comments: "Some kind of questionnaire from teachers would be helpful."

Discussion

In an effort to avoid being invasive, no attempts were made to distinguish between and access separate responses from single parents only and single parents with a non-parent adult living in the home; they emerged from the contacts made while soliciting information from single parents. The responses received were all from single mothers with a non-parent adult in the home (two of the non-parent adults being identified as relatives of the mothers). The four respondants in this category correspond to 11.4% of the total parent/caregiver surveys, raising the total single mother proportion to 51% of the entire survey population.

Most of the findings were not significantly different from the summary of all responses presented earlier. All four respondants believe that school personnel should be aware of their family composition, with one individual supporting her answer by stating, "I want my child's teacher to mention non-traditional families." An area of discrepancy was in the perceived inclusiveness of classroom discussions; 75% of respondants felt that it was inclusive of alternative families, compared with 34% of all parent/caregiver respondants. All felt it was important to represent a variety of family compositions in school materials and classroom discussion, with one person commenting, "The more diversity that children see, the more accepting they will be and the more comfortable they will feel with their family composition."

Again, in line with the opinions expressed by the entire parent/caregiver population surveyed, a significant proportion (25%) of respondants indicated that negative attitudes prevailed toward their family composition. A poignant remark made was that, "(Attitudes) vary from teacher to teacher."

Foster/Adoptive Families

Raw Data

I. GENERAL INFORMATION (Total Respondants = 7)

2. Childrens' grade level: K-4: 3 5-8: 7 9-12: 6

3. Do school personnel know your family composition?

Yes _6_ No _0_ Don't Know _1_

4. Do you think the school should know about your family composition?

Yes _7_ No _0_ No Opinion _0_

Comments: "Sometimes I can hear their inner thoughts: "Here we go again!". It has been our choice to keep the school notified of change in our family due to its diversity."

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

5. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your child uses ?

Yes _3_ No _1_ Don't Know _3_

b. The other school materials your child is exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc) ?

Yes _4_ No _2_ Don't Know _1_

c. Classroom discussion ?

Yes _2_ No _1_ Don't Know _4_

d. School library books ?

Yes _6_ No _0_ Don't Know _1_

6. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials ? Yes _7_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

b. Classroom discussion ? Yes _7_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "It is necessary to broaden children's awareness and helps them to accept diversity. Gives a picture of the real world."

"I feel it is important but it diminishes the importance of the traditional two-parent family."

III. COMMUNICATION

7. Do you feel that school registration and health forms allow for your family composition to be included (e.g. is there space on the forms for a non-parent to respond)?

Yes _2_ No _3_ No opinion _2_

8. Do you have any suggestions for making these forms more sensitive to your family composition?

Primary caregiver(s) instead of parents.
Information about custody.

9. How would you describe the quality of your communication with the school?

Excellent _4_ Adequate _4_ Unsatisfactory _0_

No Comments.

10. If you are dissatisfied with your communication with the school, do you feel it is related to school personnel opinions of your family composition?

Yes _0_ No _4_ No opinion _3_

11. When communication (such as phone calls, letters, permission for field trips) does occur between school and home, do you feel you are being addressed in an acceptable way?

Yes _6_ No _1_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "I feel the schools do a pretty good job dealing with two parent households, but hold some bias against non-traditional family compositions, tending to be judgemental."

"(Educators) values sometimes get in the way."

IV. ATTITUDES OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

12. How would you describe the attitudes of school personnel towards your family composition?

Positive _7_ Negative _0_ Indifferent _0_

Comments: "We have been supported and assisted by all school personnel. They seem to value our diverse composition."

13. Do you feel that school personnel need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents	__1_	
Step Parents	__1_	
Single Parent (mother only)	__3_	
Single Parent (father only)	__3_	
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home	__4_	
Foster/Adoptive Parents	__5_	
Same Sex Parents	__4_	
Non-Parent Relative	__2_	
Other (please specify)	__2_	(dynamics of children suffering loss).

No Comments.

14. Has your child ever been affected by comments at school about your family's composition?

Yes _5_ No _1_ No Opinion _1_

Comments: "She is in foster care and her classmates have made unkind comments."

"My foster daughter is embarressed to have people know she is in the custody of SRS."

"Maybe comments like, "Oh, _____ is a foster child", indicates hurdles that need to be overcome."

"(In the eyes of the school personnel) foster care is not a good image."

15. Do you feel that school personnel link your child's potential school performance to your family composition?

Yes _2_ No _5_ No Opinion _0_ Don't Know _0_

Comments: "(Educators) do not expect her to do well, but they encourage her appropriately and she is doing well."

16. Do the school personnel assume that your child's mother and father are both in the home (for example, by asking your child to interview mom or dad for a homework assignment)?

Comments: "Yes, they do assume, but they also offer alternative assignments."

"No. This was never a problem for my family. Teachers are very savy and give them alternatives, such as interview a neighbor's dad if yours is not available."

17. Additional Comments: "Schools sometimes refer to me as "Mom", but most of the time as "Mary". I feel this reinforces isolation to children."

"It should be up to each family as to whether or not they want their family composition known."

"Schools are not actively educating."

"School always rejoices for my childrens' successes. Problems seem to arise more from their classmates and their stereotyped ideas and experiences with other kids. And vice versa; sometimes "my kids" refuse to add to the school atmosphere because they are sure they are/will be slighted (or whatever)."

Discussion

Researchers found this to be a very organized and highly trained group, with many support services available. In many cases, these parent/caregivers are viewed as professionals to some extent. For the most part, they appeared to be definite in their views and comfortable expressing them. It can be noted that this group actively chose parenting and committed to the training and involvement by others that it demanded. Once an initial contact was made with the professionals responsible for training and supervising these parent/caregivers, there was very little difficulty in accessing the responses. Of the 12 surveys sent out, 7 were returned yielding a 58.3% return rate, which accounts for 20% of the entire survey population.

This group appears to advocate strongly for the needs of their children and make themselves visible to school personnel, as documented in the following remark: "It has been our choice to keep the school notified of changes in our family due to its diversity." For the most part, respondants believed school curriculum and materials to be inclusive of a variety of family compositions. All stated the importance of having such a variety represented, as can be seen in the following comment: "It is necessary to broaden children's awareness and help them to accept diversity. It gives a picture of the real world."

All felt that communication between home and school was at least satisfactory, with half of the respondants stating that it was excellent. When asked if they are being addressed in an acceptable way, 86% felt that they were, but it was also stated that, "I feel the schools do a pretty good job dealing with two parent households, but hold some bias against non-traditional family compositions, tending to be judgemental." "(Educators) values sometimes get in the way."

Results from the survey section on attitudes of school personnel appear to present conflicting impressions of this family composition. All respondants indicated that school personnel were positive towards their work as foster/adoptive caregivers, and there appears to be a significant level of respect. Yet at the same time, several comments were made that in the eyes of school personnel, foster care does not have a good image and there are hurdles that need to be overcome. It was also stated by a respondant that educators do not expect foster/adopted children to do well in school. The majority of respondants indicated that educators need more information regarding alternative families, with one respondant stating that, "Schools are not actively educating."

Same Sex Families

Raw Data

I. GENERAL INFORMATION (Total Respondants = 6)

2. Childrens' grade level: K-4: 2 5-8: 5 9-12: 5

3. Do school personnel know your family composition?

Yes _4_ No _0_ Don't Know _2_

4. Do you think the school should know about your family composition?

Yes _5_ No _1_ No Opinion _0_

Comments: "My daughter feels ambivalent about it."

"No: I am not confident that information would be used in compassionate or understanding manner."

"It is important for Mothers' Day/Fathers' Day, etc."

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

5. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your child uses ?

Yes _2_ No _3_ Don't Know _1_ Some _0_

b. The other school materials your child is exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc) ?

Yes _2_ No _2_ Don't Know _2_ Some _0_

c. Classroom discussion ?

Yes _3_ No _0_ Don't Know _1_ Some _2_

d. School library books ?

Yes _2_ No _1_ Don't Know _3_ Some _0_

6. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials ? Yes _6_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

b. Classroom discussion ? Yes _6_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "I think it is essential. The group that continues to be left out is lesbian/gay/bisexual families. Kids pick up on this--the lack of reference suggests something is wrong."

"My daughter feels different from everyone--she doesn't know if anyone else is from a non-traditional family and is not represented."

III. COMMUNICATION

7. Do you feel that school registration and health forms allow for your family composition to be included (e.g. is there space on the forms for a non-parent to respond)?

Yes _1_ No _4_ No opinion _1_

8. Do you have any suggestions for making these forms more sensitive to your family composition?

Change the language from mother/father.
Give space for more than one address.
Give space for significant adults in each home (if more than one).
Leave room for comments regarding home or family.

9. How would you describe the quality of your communication with the school?

Excellent _2_ Adequate _4_ Unsatisfactory _0_

Comments: "Excellent because I serve as a school board member: If I didn't, my response would be "adequate".

"(Excellent because) we are well known and very active--this is not the norm."

10. If you are dissatisfied with your communication with the school, do you feel it is related to school personnel opinions of your family composition?

Yes _0_ No _4_ No opinion _0_

11. When communication (such as phone calls, letters, permission for field trips) does occur between school and home, do you feel you are being addressed in an acceptable way?

Yes _5_ No _1_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "I'd like my partner to feel more included. This possibility still seems a long way off, given the conservative nature of public education."

IV. ATTITUDES OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

12. How would you describe the attitudes of school personnel towards your family composition?

Positive _2_ Negative _0_ Indifferent _4_

Comments: "There are a few men who are reserved or seemingly concerned about male role models for our kids."

13. Do you feel that school personnel need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents __0_
Step Parents __2_
Single Parent (mother only) __2_
Single Parent (father only) __2_
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home __2_
Foster/Adoptive Parents __3_
Same Sex Parents __4_
Non-Parent Relative __2_
Other (please specify) __2_ (other cultures).

Comments: "I believe the silence comes from discomfort ...Gays need to model more forthright behavior."

"They need to understand the special problems these (family compositions) face, and to confront prejudices that they as educators have, and to clarify values they as teachers hold about what it means to be a parent."

14. Has you child ever been affected by comments at school about your family's composition?

Yes _4_ No _1_ No Opinion _1_

Comments: "Not by comments directed at her, but by a generally negative attitude toward homosexuality which persists out of ignorance amongst kids. She lives in fear that kids will shun her."

"Made fun of...crank phone calls...the children effectively "cover up" our family composition in general."

"An art teacher arguing year after year that "no child has no father": One of our children is donor result."

15. Do you feel that school personnel link your child's potential school performance to your family composition?

Yes _1_ No _3_ No Opinion _0_ Don't Know _2_

Comments: "Yes, they say so."

16. Do the school personnel assume that your child's mother and father are both in the home (for example, by asking your child to interview mom or dad for a homework assignment)?

Yes _2_ No _4_

17. Additional Comments: "Thanks for looking at this important issue."

"...There's enough fear out there that people don't feel safe pushing a gay rights agenda for themselves or others."

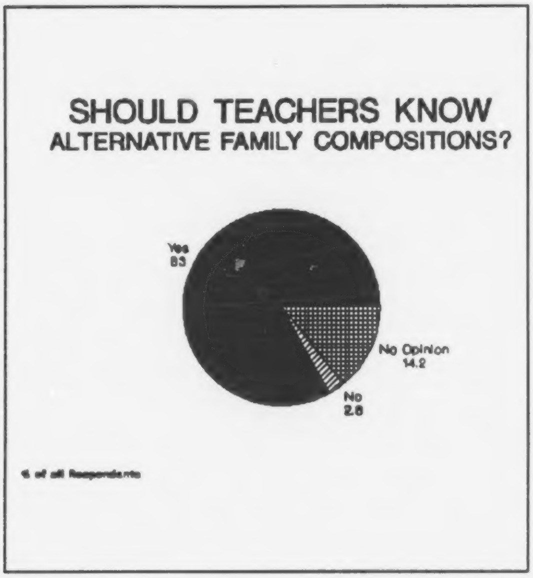
"More than active, negative things happening. There is rather an indifference or absence of an acknowledgement of our family composition and other families similar to ours."

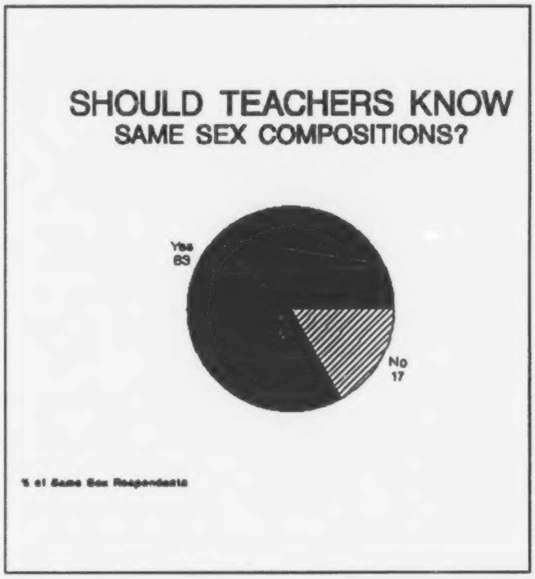
"While we have encountered little homophobia, sexism or other prejudices we know many families that have."

Discussion

It is the impression of the researchers that gay and lesbian individuals have historically been parent/caregivers, but due to recent political and social movements promoting acceptance of diverse lifestyles, they are becoming increasingly visible and organized (Casper, in press). In the light of this increased visibility, it appears that more and more gay and lesbian individuals and couples are choosing to become parent/caregivers (Casper, in press). This, coupled with the fact that many gay and lesbian parent/caregivers have children from former heterosexual relationships, evidences the increasing emergence of this family composition. Although many gay and lesbian parent/ caregivers are discrete about the nature of their family composition (possibly because of society's reaction), respondants were accessible and communicative via both formal and informal channels. Of the 17 surveys distributed, 6 were returned, yielding a 35.3% rate of return. These surveys constitute 17.1% of the parent/caregiver population surveyed.

Although survey respondants appear to be a visible group in schools and appear to desire this visibility, a common theme throughout their comments and responses was that anxiety prevails around potential negative reactions and misuse of information by others. Seventeen per cent of respondants indicated that they did not feel that school personnel should know about their family composition, possibly due to lack of confidence "that information would be used in (a) compassionate or understanding manner." There is an obvious discrepancy here with only 2.8% of the total parent/caregiver respondants indicating this negative reaction to school personnel knowing their family compositions:





Respondants all advocated inclusion of alternative families in school materials and classroom discussion, with one statement clearly indicating a further separation of gay and lesbian families from all those termed alternative: "The group that continues to be left out is lesbian/gay/bisexual families. Kids pick up on this--the lack of reference suggests something is wrong." Another indicated, "My daughter feels different from everyone--she doesn't know if anyone else is from a non-traditional family and is not represented."

Perceptions of communication were closely correlated to the summary of all compositions, with one additional significant comment: "I'd like my partner to feel more included. This possibility still seems a long way off, given the conservative nature of public education." Respondants highlighted what was seen as a need for teacher education and raised awareness of alternative lifestyles: "They need to understand the special problems these (family compositions) face, and to confront prejudices that they as educators have, and to clarify values they as teachers hold about what it means to be a parent." While it was clear that respondants saw the need for teacher education, they also indicated the strong need for the education of students, as can be seen in the following comments: "(There is a) generally negative attitude toward homosexuality, which persists out of ignorance amongst kids. (My daughter) lives in fear that kids will shun her."; "...the children effectively "cover up" our family composition in general."; "There's enough fear out there that people don't feel safe pushing a gay rights agenda for themselves or others."

TEACHERS

TEACHERS - SUMMARY

Student Information

Raw Data

(Total Respondants = 24)

Grade Levels: K-4: 20 5-8: 4 9-12: 0

1. Do you know the current family compositions of your students?

   Yes_21_ No_3_

2. Please indicate the percentage of your students you believe come from the following family compositions:

% bands of students from various compositions

	0	1-24	25-49	50-74	75-100
Both Natural Parents	0	1	9	5	9
Step Family	6	18	0	0	0
Single Parent (mother only)	4	10	7	3	0
Single Parent (father only)	14	10	0	0	0
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home	8	15*	1	0	0
Foster/Adoptive Parents	19	5	0	0	0
Same Sex Parents	22	2	0	0	0
Non-Parent Relative	18	8	0	0	0

(# of respondants)

* Note: Due to the complexity of representing the responses visually, an attempt will be made to explain the charted information through a narrative form. The percentage bands atop each column refer to the (estimated) percent of children within each surveyed teacher's classroom which come from each of the family compositions listed on the left of the chart. The figures within each column indicate the number of respondants that had that percent of students from each composition. For example, the figure 15 highlighted in the chart indicates that 15 of the 24 teacher respondants believe that between 1-24% of their students came from a household composed of a single parent with non-parent adult living in the home.

3. Do you feel it is important information to have?

Yes_24_ No_0_ No Opinion_0_

Summary of Comments: Crisis and composition transition times were noted as times of particular need for awareness, along with a general feeling of more information being beneficial.

Discussion

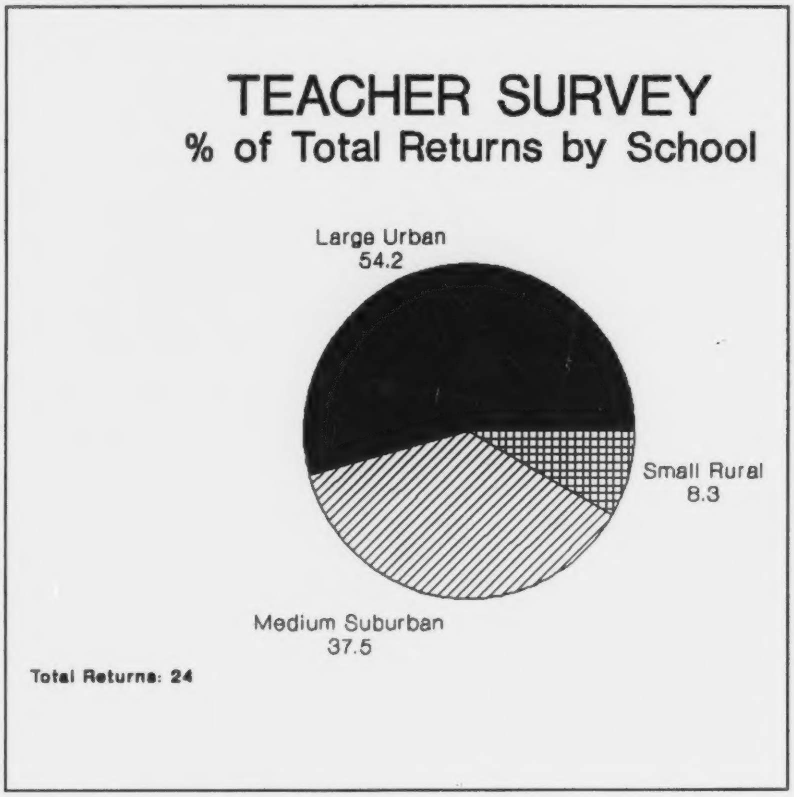
Respondants to the teacher survey came from three schools in Washington and Chittenden counties: One large urban, one medium sized suburban, and one small rural school. Of the 39 surveys distributed, 24 were returned, yielding a 61.5% rate of return. The percentage returns within each school is shown in the chart below:

TEACHER SURVEY

% Returns within each School

SCHOOLS	# SENT	# RETURNED	%
Large Urban	20	13	65.0
Medium Suburban	13	9	69.0
Small Rural	6	2	33.3
TOTALS	39	24	61.5

The majority of total responses came from the large urban school and the least came from the small rural school, which is congruent with the size of the schools and the number of surveys sent out (see chart below). It was felt by the researchers that the small rural school was under-represented in this study, with adequate representation from the two other schools. All of the teachers that responded taught in public elementary schools.



Almost 90% of respondants indicated that they knew the family compositions of their students, with 100% stating that this was important information to have. All alternative family compositions listed in the survey were represented, with the highest representation coming from single mother (only) households, and the lowest representation being same sex families. Overall, teachers indicated that the vast majority of their students came from a "both natural parent" family composition (almost 40% of teachers stated that 75-100% of their students were from this composition), which appears to be somewhat above the Vermont statistics. In Vermont, approximately 75% of children under 18 live in a two-parent household, but this figure includes step-families and foster/adoptive families (U.S. Census, 1990). Over 70% of teachers indicated that between 1% and 49% of their students came from single mother (only) households (with almost 30% indicating 25-49% of students being from this composition). Again, these estmates appear somewhat high, due to the fact that only 14.5% of Vermont families are headed by single mothers (U.S. Census, 1990).

One quarter of respondants believed that they had no students living in a step family composition, which appears very low. In Vermont, a distinction is not made between biological two-parent families and step-families, but as national figures indicate, approximately 15% of children live in step-families (U.S. Census, 1990). A third of the teachers stated that they had students that came from single parent households with non-parent adults.

The remaining compositions: Single father (only), foster/adoptive parents, same sex families, and non-parent relative families all appear to be proportionately represented in sampled schools, when compared with Vermont figures.

Implications

Almost 90% of teachers surveyed stated that they knew their students' family compositions (which appears accurate when compared to Vermont statistics), and all expressed that this was important information to have. This clearly implies that teachers are on the whole aware of their students' home environments and appreciate some value of having this type of information. Conversely, it appears that one in ten teachers do not have this information while clearly stating they want it.

As indicated in the discussion of this section of the survey, it seems likely that there are over-estimations by teachers of the numbers of students from both natural parent and single mother home environments. This may imply a more conservative view of today's families than is actually the case.

Recommendations

1) It is strongly recommended that all classroom teachers know the family composition of all of their students, and be open to the fact that it is ever-changing and in need of constant update (see Appendix F for sample form for soliciting information on students' home environment). Non-classroom based teachers should also have this information and access it through classroom teachers.

School Curriculum and Materials

Raw Data

4. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your students use?

Yes _11_ No _8_ Don't know _3_ Don't use _2_

b. The other school materials your students are exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc)?

Yes _13_ No _6_ Don't know _3_ Don't use _2_

c. Classroom discussion?

Yes _23_ No _1_ Don't know _0_ Don't use _0_

d. School library books?

Yes _23_ No _0_ Don't know _1_ Don't use _0_

Summary of comments: Most recognized a need to make students feel "normal" and included through exposing them to alternative family compositions.

5. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

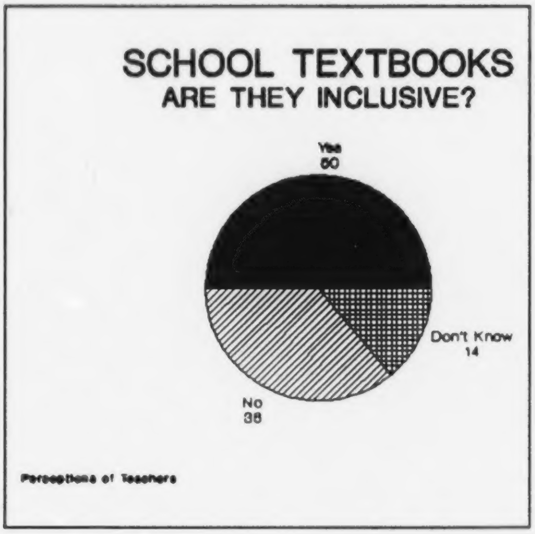
a. School materials? Yes _23_ No _1_ No opinion _0_

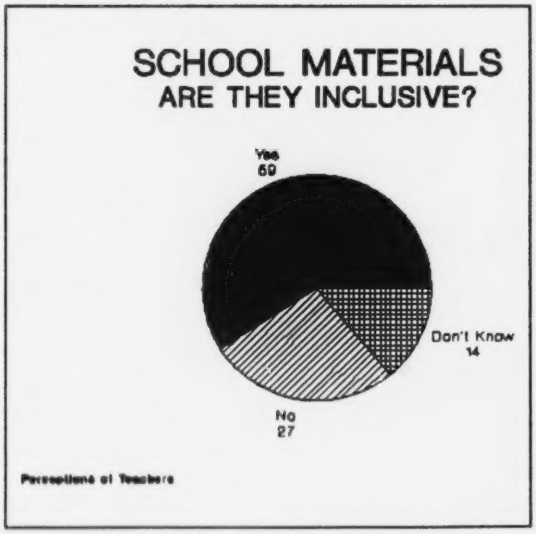
b. Classroom discussion? Yes _24_ No _0_ No opinion _0_

Summary of comments: Again, a wish to reflect real life circumstances and promote acceptance of diversity prompted most responses.

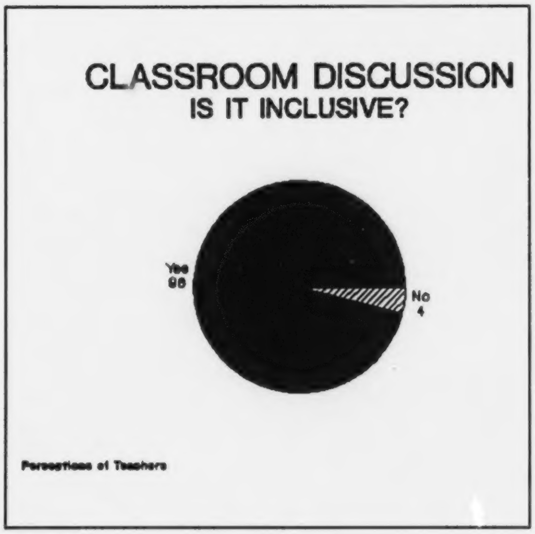
Discussion

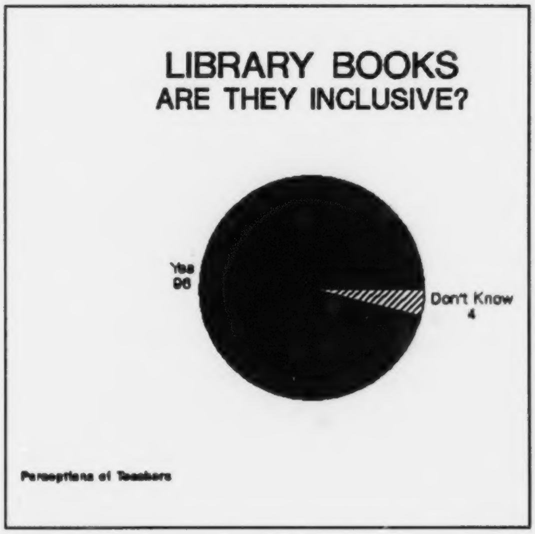
Fifty per cent of teachers indicated that the texts they use in their classrooms are inclusive of a variety of family compositions. Almost 60% state that the materials they use are similarly inclusive. Comments also indicated that most teachers recognized the need to expose students to such alternative family compositions in order to make students feel "normal". All but one respondant indicated a perceived importance of having a variety of family compositions represented in school materials (the one not in favor of inclusion commented, "If it means buying all new materials then I feel it is not (important)."





Overwhelmingly (a ratio of 23:1), teachers believe that classroom discussion and school library books represent a variety of family compositions:





Everyone felt it was important in classroom discussion, due to a desire to reflect real life circumstances and promote acceptance of diversity.

Implications

Only 50% of teachers stated that their textbooks were inclusive of a variety of family compositions, while 60% said the same of other school materials. This has strong implications for students from those compositions, who are not seeing their lifestyles reflected in materials presented. If, as teachers are saying in this survey, classroom materials should be inclusive, then the implication is that the materials available to teachers does not suit their needs or the needs of their students. Teachers perceive themselves to be incorporating alternative lifestyles in the classroom discussions they facilitate, which again indicates that it is the supplemental texts and materials available to them which are preventing greater inclusion.

Recommendations

1) It is recommended that textbooks and other materials used in classrooms be continuously reviewed and updated to ensure inclusivity of all alternative families. Again, with textbooks that are not fully inclusive, the thought that textbooks may drive curricula is of even greater concern than expressed earlier.

Communication

Raw Data

6. When referring to the adults your students live with, what terms do you use?

Terms Used	# of Respondants Who Use Each Term
Family	3
(Ask the student for appropriate term)	3
(Caregiver's first name)	2
Someone you care about at home	1
Parents	11
Mom	9
Dad	11
Grandparents	2
Friend	1
Aunt/Uncle	2
Guardian	1
Step-Parent	2
Boyfriend	1

7. When contacting students' families, with whom do you typically communicate (e.g. mother, guardian, father, babysitter)?

Term Used	# of Respondants who use each term
Mom	18
Dad	9
Guardian	3
Grandparents	4
(Person listed as contact)	1
Parents	2
Step-father	1
(First name)	1

8. How would you describe the quality of that communication?

Excellent _10_ Adequate _12_ Unsatisfactory _0_

If you are unsatisfied with the quality of home/school communication, do you feel it is related to the student's family composition?

Yes _12_ No _10_ No opinion _2_

Summary of comments: Stability of the family and individual family investments cited as causal factors.

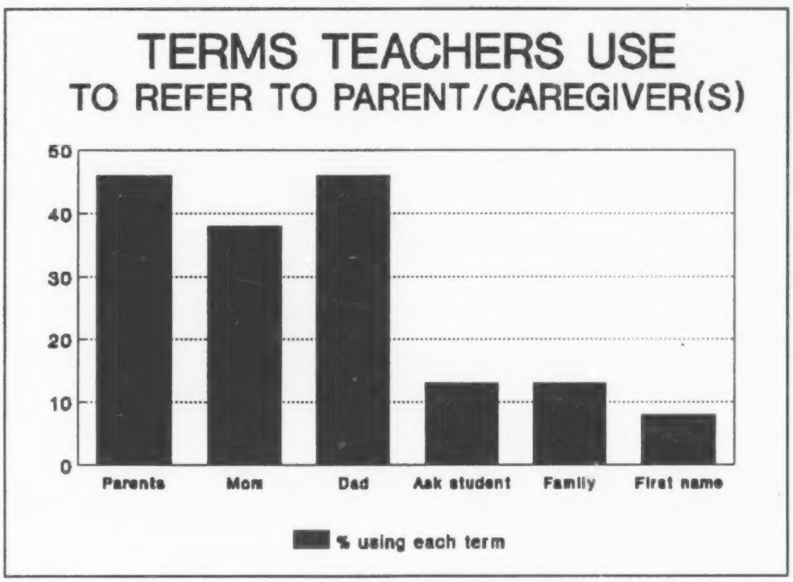
9. Can you identify particular family compositions that you are more comfortable communicating with?

	Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Uncomfortable
Both natural parents	24	0	0
Step parents	18	4	2
Foster/adoptive parents	15	4	5
Same sex parents	12	3	9
Single parent (mother only)	22	2	0
Single parent (father only)	20	3	1
Single parent with non-parent adult in the home	17	3	4
Non-parent relative	13	4	7

Summary of comments: Most respondants claimed to be comfortable with all individuals, with some stating some personal preferences.

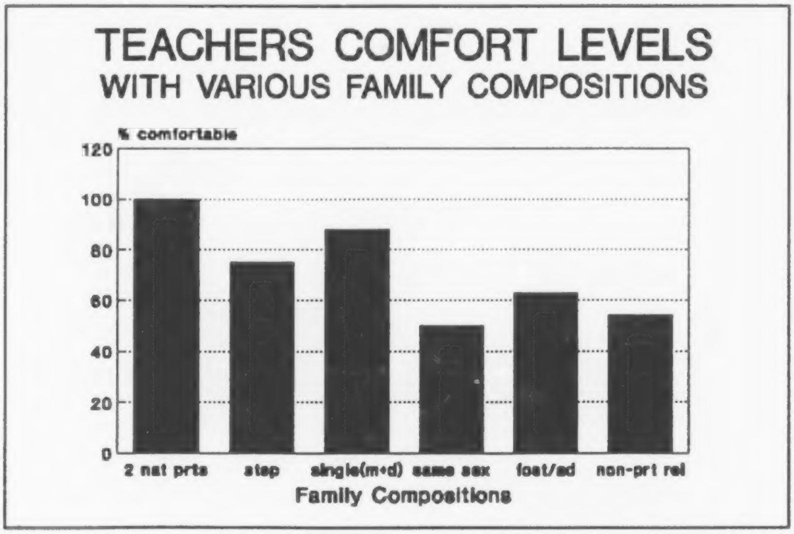
Discussion

Outstandingly, the terms most frequently used when referring to the adults that students live with were: Parents (almost 50% of respondants used this term); Dad (almost 50%); and Mom (almost 40%). Approximately 12% of teachers refer to "family" and use the term that the student proposes. Less than 10% of respondants indicated that they used terms such as the caregiver's first name, "guardian", or "someone you care about at home".



All teachers thought that communication with students' homes was at least adequate, and 42% thought that it was excellent. Forty-two per cent also thought that communication difficulties indicating that stability and investment of family members were the key factors.

When asked to consider their comfort level in communicating with various family compositions, most respondants claimed to be comfortable with all individuals, while some stated personal preferences. All teachers indicated they were comfortable communicating with households that contained both natural (biological) parents. Comfort levels decreased through the list of alternative family compositions presented in the survey: Single mother (92%); single father (83%); step family (75%); single parent and non-parent adult (71%). The alternative family compositions that respondants were least comfortable communicating with were same sex parents, with only 50% stating they were comfortable, and 38% clearly stating they were uncomfortable; and non-parent relatives (54% comfortable and 30% uncomfortable).



Implications

The terms commonly being used in classrooms surveyed do not appear to be inclusive of alternative family compositions. "Parent", "mom", "dad" were overwhelmingly the terms that most respondants used, and while it is likely that at least one of these terms will be applicable to most students, the implications of this practice are that a significant percentage of students may be left out, due to the variety of parent/ caregivers present today on either a full-time or part-time basis.

It appears that teachers are, overall, most comfortable with family compositions that most resemble traditional two-parent households and/or the less alternative compositions that have been visible for a longer period of time. This increased comfort by teachers, in dealing with longer-standing alternative family compositions, may be due to length of exposure, amount of information, and de-sensitization over time to such alternatives, which in turn may have led to increased awareness and eventually acceptance. As stated earlier, respondants indicated a high percentage of discomfort in communicating with some of the more publicly emerging alternative compositions (same sex, non-parent relative). If this premise is true, then the implication for increased awareness of and exposure to such diversity by educators appears to be of extreme significance, in order to assure that students from all of the various alternative compositions are safe and not subject to discriminatory practices.

A related issue of even greater concern, is that of stated bias and personal preference in dealing with certain alternative families. The following comment clearly communicates such biases: "I am uncomfortable with (same sex) parenting, due to my own prejudices about what I consider as a proper parenting model". Research referred to earlier in this paper that evidences the presence of hidden curricula (i.e. stereotyping, invisibility or omission of such lifestyles) in classrooms would strongly support the implication that such personal preferences--stated or unstated/unrecognized--will be inculcated in students, and that their negative effects may be profound and long-lasting (Garcia et al, 1988; Good & Brophy, 1987).

iv) Recommendations

1) It is recommended that teachers continue to use the terms they are most comfortable with, such as "parent", "mom", "dad", in classrooms; but not exclusively. Additional terms that are highly recommended, due to the fact that they will be inclusive of all students from traditional and non-traditional households, are: Caregiver(s), the adult(s) you live with, someone you care about at home.

2) It is recommended that teachers focus on the stability and quality of a student's home environment, rather than on the nature of its composition, which may invoke stereotypes.

3) It is strongly recommended that teachers actively educate themselves with regard to all lifestyles (including those that are less visible), due to the apparent connection between awareness and acceptance, as stated in the preceding discussion. As was evidenced in the statistics presented in the literature review on the changing compositions of today's families, the majority of students may soon be coming from alternative family compositions, and educators must respond by providing a safe and inclusive environment for all.

4) It is recommened that teachers make a concerted attempt to be aware of their own personal biases regarding family

lifestyles, and make a conscious decision to avoid potential "hidden curriculum".

Perceptions of Family Compositions

Raw Data

10. Do you need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents __5_
Step Parents __5_
Single Parent (mother only) __7_
Single Parent (father only) __5_
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home _9_
Foster/Adoptive Parents __6_
Same Sex Parents __8_
Non-Parent Relative _11_
Other (please specify) __1_ (divorcing couples)

Summary of comments: Very diverse comments, including a perceived need for more information on all compositions and concerns over legal issues.

11. Do you feel that students' emotional or behavioral stability is closely linked to their family composition?

Yes _18_ No _6_ No opinion _0_

Summary of comments: Again, a distinction between composition and stability of relationships was highlighted, although some personal bias was evident in some comments.

12. Do you feel that students' academic performance is closely linked to their family composition?

Yes _16 No _8_ No opinion _0_

Summary of comments: A very clear distinction was made between two-parent and non-traditional compositions as influences on student performance.

13. Do you ...:

a. plan social events at school for only mother or father to attend with the child (for example, Breakfast with Dad, Mother and Daughter Dinner, etc.)?

Yes _0_ No _24_

b. ask your students to interview their mother/father for a class assignment?

Yes _7_ No _17_

c. ask your students to make presents for mother/father at school?

Yes _12_ No _12_

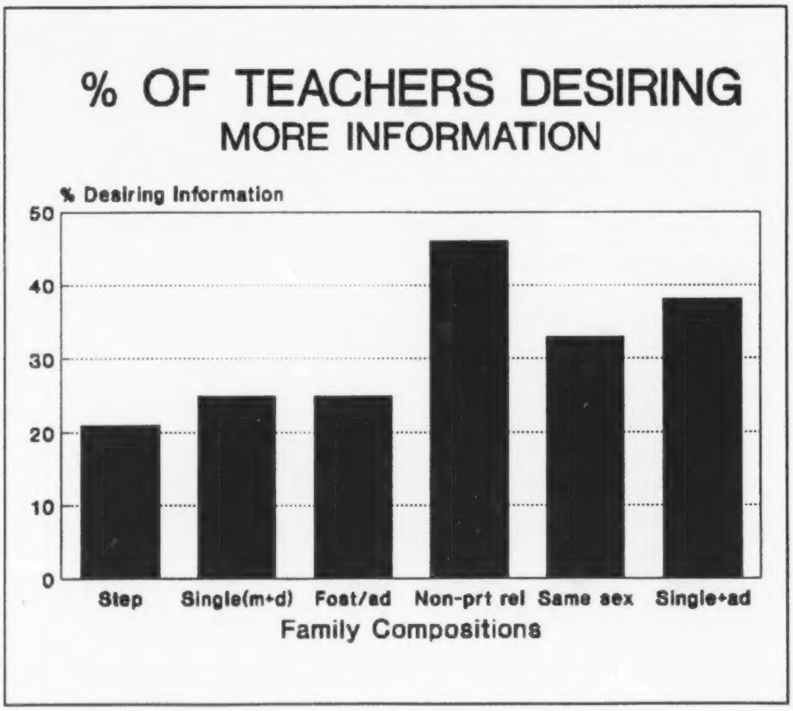
d. plan other activities for the adults your students live with?

Yes _20_ No _4_

Summary of comments: Numerous references were made to highlight alternative functions/events planned, that are more inclusive in their nature.

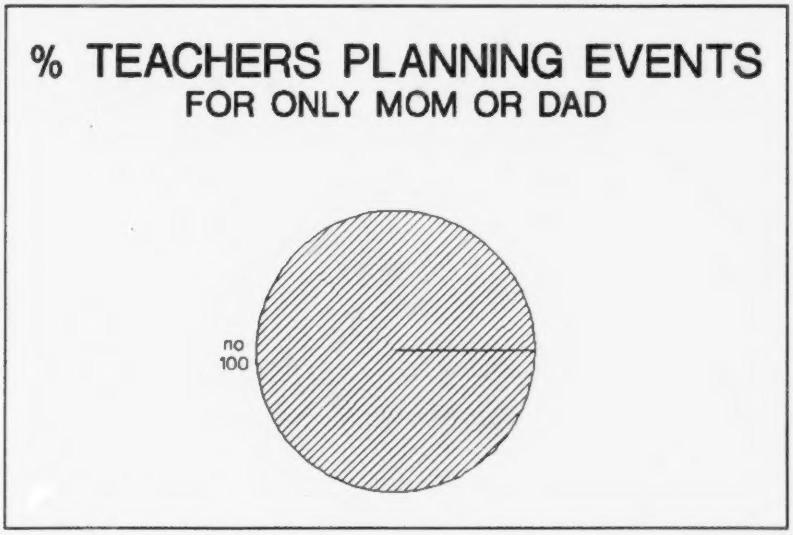
Discussion

Overall, it appears that teachers do not perceive themselves as being in need of more information to deal effectively with the various family compositions. Over 50% of respondants stated that they did not want any information at all, while others indicated varying levels of interest in obtaining more information on specific compositions (46% wanted information on non-parent relatives; 33% on same sex; 29% on single mothers; 25% on foster/adoptive; 21% on natural parents, step parents and single fathers). Comments indicated many concerns over legal issues impacting upon release of information on a student.

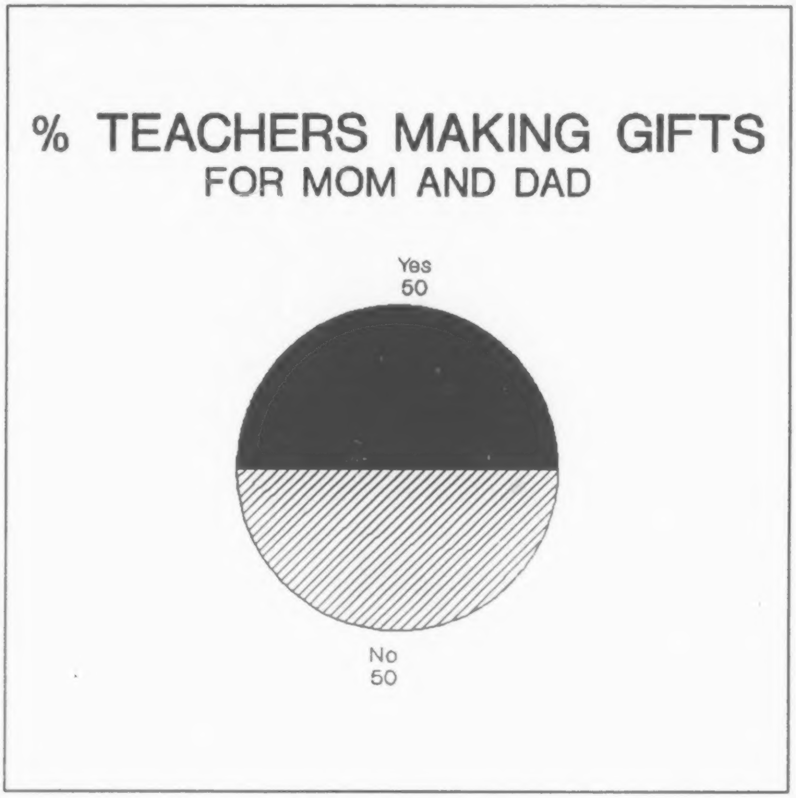


Approximately 70% of respondants indicated a link between a student's social and emotional stability, as well as academic performance and their family composition. Comments provided two distinct rationales for this perspective: The first linking a child's home life stability to his/her school performance (eg "I think that it's more important for the family to be a loving, nurturing, stable and composed environment with healthy, mature adult(s) as "parents"."); the other making assumptions with regard to family compositions (eg "Involvement of parents and consistency of affection and discipline is very important. Often this is missing in one-parent families.").

None of the teachers surveyed indicated planning social events at school for only mother/father to attend (e.g. breakfast with dad, mother/daughter dinner). Many (83%) did indicate that they plan alternative functions/ events for the adults their students live with that are more inclusive in their nature.



Fifty per cent of respondants indicated that they do ask their students to make presents at school for mother or father.



Implications

There appears to be a discrepancy between teachers' comfort in communicating with some of the alternative family compositions, and their perceived need for information about those compositions. Fifty per cent of respondants indicated that they were not comfortable communicating with same sex parents, yet only 33% indicated a perceived need for more information about that composition. Similarly, 38% were not comfortable dealing with foster/adoptive parents, while only 25% wanted information. If the assumption holds true that change can occur in the following way: Increased information leads to a greater awareness that in turn potentially leads to an acceptance, then it appears that some of the teachers represented in this survey are not desiring of change.

A high proportion of respondants (almost 70%) felt that a student's family composition impacted upon his/her social/emotional and academic performance in school. Several comments qualified this statement by indicating that stability within a family was the key factor to a child's development, not family structure. However, numerous other comments suggested negative assunptions about certain alternative family compositions being unable to adequately support their children with regard to school activities. Due to the lack of clarity in the phrasing of these questions in the survey (#s 11 & 12), it is not clear what percentage of the respondants thought that family composition (ie single parent, same sex, etc), rather than the stability of the home environment, was the key factor. Clearly though, a percentage of the respondants did feel that the type of family composition was the determining factor in a child's school success or lack of success. The implication of this is that, due to their family composition, some students may potentially operate under lower teacher expectations, which may influence actual achievement through self-fulfilling prophecies documented in the literature review (Good & Brophy, 1987).

Responses to questions concerning school events/activities that are parent-oriented were on the whole positive. Through providing activities that center around the students' broader community and not focussing upon "parents", teachers are being more inclusive of "significant adult(s)" in a child's life that are not dependent on composition or title (Mom, Dad).

Recommendations

1) It is recommended that teachers remain "open" to information and training regarding family composition, particularly to those that are now emerging, as well as those that may become visible in the future.

2) It is recommended that training/information sharing be done by professionals in the field, as well as the experts themselves: Individuals (adult and child) from the various alternative compositions.

3) It is recommended that all school personnel receive training with regard to specific legal issues connected with various family compositions. Some of the concerns raised in the survey were: Custody, confidentiality, and sharing of information with other significant adults in a child's life.

4) As previously indicated, it is recommended that teachers focus on the quality of relationships and overall health of the environment in which a child lives, rather than the specific composition of his/her family. Teachers are cautioned not to make assumptions about the positive or negative nature of a child's home environment, based only on the structure or the number/sexuality/etc of the adults present.

5) It is acknowledged and appreciated that educators will always have personal opinions regarding alternative family compositions or any other topic, but if those personal opinions are allowed to interfere with meeting the needs of particular students, then personal opinions could translate into biased, harmful practices. It is therefore recommended that teachers try to consciously separate personal opinion from practice.

TEACHERS - BY SCHOOL

Large Urban School

Raw Data

(Total respondants = 13)

Grade Levels: K-4: 11 5-8: 2 9-12: 0

I. STUDENT INFORMATION

1. Do you know the current family compositions of your students?

Yes_10_ No_3_

2. Please indicate the percentage of your students you believe come from the following family compositions:

% bands of students from various compositions

	0	1-24	25-49	50-74	75-100
Both Natural Parents	0	1	7	4	1
Step Family	6	7	0	0	0
Single Parent (mother only)	0	4	6	3	0
Single Parent (father only)	7	6	0	0	0
Single Parent with non-parent	2	10*	1	0	0
Foster/Adoptive Parents	10	3	0	0	0
Same Sex Parents	12	1	0	0	0
Non-Parent Relative	9	4	0	0	0

* Note: Due to the complexity of representing the responses visually, an attempt will be made to explain the charted information through a narrative form. The percentage bands atop each column refer to the (estimated) percent of children within each surveyed teacher's classroom which come from each of the family compositions listed on the left of the chart. The figures within each column indicate the number of respondants that had that percent of students from each composition. For example, the figure 10 highlighted in the chart indicates that 10 of the 13 teacher respondants believe that between 1-24% of their students came from a household composed of a single parent with non-parent adult living in the home.

3. Do you feel it is important information to have?

Yes_13_ No_0_ No Opinion_0_

Comments: "Changing family situations are often traumatic events in a child's life and awareness of this affects teacher response to the child."

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

4. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g.single

father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your students use?

Yes_5_ No_4_ Don't know_3_ Don't use_1_

b. The other school materials your students are exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc)?

Yes_6_ No_4_ Don't know_3_ Don't use_0_

c. Classroom discussion?

Yes_13_ No_0_ Don't know_0_ Don't use_0_

d. School library books?

Yes_12_ No_0_ Don't know_1_ Don't use_0_

Comments: "I only include single parents and adopted children...value systems are involved."

"Some kids from broken homes feel they're the exception and don't realize so many others are from similar situations. Seeing on TV or reading more about it may help them feel less freakish."

5. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials? Yes_12_ No_1_ No opinion_0_

b. Classroom discussion? Yes_13_ No_0_ No opinion_0_

Comments: "It's a real life situation for all."

"If it means buying all new materials then I feel it isn't (important)."

"We need to have children aware of the variety of lifestyles and families that are a part of us all."

III. COMMUNICATION

6. When referring to the adults your students live with, what terms do you use?

Terms Used	# of Respondants Who Use Each Term
(Ask the student)	1
(First name)	1
Someone you care about at home	1
Parents	5
Mom	8
Dad	10
Grandparents	2
Friend	1
Aunt/Uncle	2
Guardian	1
Step-parent	2
Boyfriend	1

7. When contacting students' families, with whom do you typically communicate (e.g. mother, guardian, father, babysitter)?

Term Used	# of Respondants Who Use Each Term
Mom	11
Dad	5
Guardian	2
Whoever listed as contact	1
Grandparents	2

8. How would you describe the quality of that communication?

Excellent_4_ Adequate_7_ Unsatisfactory_0_ N/A_1_ Varies_1_

If you are unsatisfied with the quality of home/school communication, do you feel it is related to the student's family composition?

Yes_9_ No_2_ No opinion_2_

Comments: "Respect level, individuals involved."

"There are receptive communicative parents or parent figures in all family situations, just as there are people without those abilities in all family types."

9. Can you identify particular family compositions that you are more comfortable communicating with?

	Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Uncomfortable
Both natural parents	13	0	0
Step parents	10	2	1
Foster/adoptive parents	8	2	3
Same sex parents	6	2	5
Single parent (mother only)	12	1	0
Single parent (father only)	11	2	0
Single parent with non-parent adult in the home	10	2	1
Non-parent relative	7	3	3

Comments: "I am more familiar with natural or step-family situations and therefore more comfortable."

"...My concern is for the child, regardless of the home situation."

"Legal issues."

IV. PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY COMPOSITIONS

10. Do you need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents _3__
Step Parents _3__
Single Parent (mother only) _5__
Single Parent (father only) _3__
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home _5__
Foster/Adoptive Parents _3__
Same Sex Parents _4__
Non-Parent Relative _5__
Other (please specify) (No more on any):_7__

Comments: "You need as much information as possible in dealing with any family composition."

11. Do you feel that students' emotional or behavioral stability is closely linked to their family composition?

Yes _12_ No _1_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "I feel that family has the greatest influence on any person of any age. If the family's a mess, the child probably is too."

"If things are emotionally stable at home, the child will be stable in most instances."

"Change in composition is important."

"Involvement of parents and consistency of affection and discipline is very important. Often this is missing in one-parent families."

12. Do you feel that students' academic performance is closely linked to their family composition?

Yes _10_ No _3_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "In general, success is much more apt to occur in two-parent families."

13. Do you ...:

a. plan social events at school for only mother or father to attend with the child (for example, Breakfast with Dad, Mother and Daughter Dinner, etc.)?

Yes _0_ No _13_

b. ask your students to interview their mother/father for a class assignment?

Yes _2_ No _11_

c. ask your students to make presents for mother/father at school?

Yes _7_ No _6_

d. plan other activities for the adults your students live with?

Yes _12_ No _1_

Comments: "(We state) all adults; family events; all community."

"Parent group - parenting skills and support."

14. Additional comments:

"Changing families have had a big influence on the way children arrive in kindergarten and in their ability to grow and learn."

"I believe that if a family is comfortable with their living arrangement and it is healthy and non-abusive, then a child will grow up healthy, happy and safe."

"I'm not really sure of the significance of this survey. I feel most teachers are sensitive to the groups of students in their classes and their backgrounds, and make decisions accordingly."

Discussion

The majority (77%) of teachers surveyed from the large urban school indicated that they knew the family compositions of their students, and the picture painted by those teachers is one of diversity of compositions represented in their classrooms. Over 50% of the teachers indicated that fewer students from their classrooms come from family compositions made up of both natural parents (as compared to Vermont statistics cited in the literature review), and that a higher percentage come from one-parent families. This in fact may be a very realistic interpretation of the geographical area in which they teach, and reflects well on the awareness of the educators involved.

Approximately 45% of respondants indicated that the texts and school materials they used were inclusive of alternative family compositions, which matches the figures presented in the overall summary of teachers surveyed. All of the teachers indicated that they were inclusive of a variety of family compositions in their classroom discussion, although the extent of that inclusivity apparently varies, as can be seen in the following comments: "I only include single parents and adopted children...value systems are involved."; "Some kids from broken homes feel they're the exception and don't realize so many others are from similar situations. Seeing on TV and reading more about it may help them feel less freakish.". Ninety-two per cent of respondants felt it was important to represent a variety of compositions, with the one dissenting respondant stating, "If it means buying all new materials, then I feel it isn't important."

The vast majority of teachers used the terms "mom" (62%) and "dad" (77%) when referring to the adult(s) the children live with, with 38% indicating that they use the phrase, "someone you care about at home". Eleven out of the thirteen respondants indicated adequate to excellent quality of communication with students' homes, and 82% of those who expressed an opinion stated that the communication was related to the student's family composition, qualifying with comments such as, "There are receptive, communicative parents or parent figures in all family situations, just as there are people without those abilities in all family types.".

All respondants indicated that they were comfortable in communicating with family compositions made up of both natural parents; 92% comfortable with single mothers; 85% with single fathers; and 77% with both single parent (with non-parent adult) and step parents. Far fewer respondants were comfortable with the remaining composition listed: Foster/adoptive (62%); non-parent relative (54%); same sex (46%); with some respondants stating they were clearly uncomfortable with these compositions. Familiarity and legal issues were cited as reasons for the variance in comfort levels.

Fifty-four per cent of teachers did not perceive the need for any information on any of the family compositions; while others indicated that they desire more information on each of the compositions in varying degrees, as highlighted through the comment, "You need as much information as possible in dealing with any family composition". There were apparent discrepancies with regard to comfort level and the perceived need for more information: Only 31% of teachers wanted information on same sex families, with 54% stating that were not comfortable communicating with this family composition; and 23% wanted more information on foster/adoptive families, while 38% were clearly not comfortable.

Many teachers in this school clearly linked a student's emotional/behavioral and academic performance with their family composition, with a mix of positive and negative comments expressed concerning alternative families: "If things are emotionally stable at home, the child will be stable in most instances"; "In general, success is much more apt to occur in two-parent familes".

Teachers from this school are on the whole planning alternative events/activities to be more inclusive of all students, that was reflected in the figures regarding all teachers surveyed in the summary section. Additional comments made at the end of the surveys completed by teachers from the large urban school indicated the wide variation in opinions as to the importance of this topic: "I believe that if a family is comfortable with their living arrangement and it is healthy and non-abusive, then a child will grow up healthy, happy and safe"; "I'm not really sure of the significance of this survey. I feel most teachers are sensitive to the groups of students in their classes and their backgrounds, and make decisions accordingly".

Medium Suburban School

Raw Data

(Total respondants = 9)

Grade Levels: K-4: 7 5-8: 2 9-12: 0

I. STUDENT INFORMATION

1. Do you know the current family compositions of your students?

Yes_9_ No_0_

2. Please indicate the percentage of your students you believe come from the following family compositions:

% bands of students from various compositions

	0	1-24	25-49	50-74	75-100
Both Natural Parents	0	0	2	1	6
Step Family	0	9	0	0	0
Single Parent (mother only)	3	5	1	0	0
Single Parent (father only)	6	3	0	0	0
Single Parent with non-parent	5	4*	0	0	0
Foster/Adoptive Parents	8	1	0	0	0
Same Sex Parents	8	1	0	0	0
Non-Parent Relative	8	1	0	0	0

* Note: Due to the complexity of representing the responses visually, an attempt will be made to explain the charted information through a narrative form. The percentage bands atop each column refer to the (estimated) percent of children within each surveyed teacher's classroom which come from each of the family compositions listed on the left of the chart. The figures within each column indicate the number of respondants that had that percent of students from each composition. For example, the figure 4 highlighted in the chart indicates that 4 of the 9 teacher respondants believe that between 1-24% of their students came from a household composed of a single parent with non-parent adult living in the home.

3. Do you feel it is important information to have?

Yes_9_ No_0_ No Opinion_0_

Comments: "It sometimes affects kids' feelings, attitudes and behavior."

"It can tell me a geat deal about what the student is going through at home."

"If the family is in transition, it usually affects the student's emotional life and academic performance."

"Yes, if the situation reflects upon the child's work. No for those who are not affected by a family situation in school."

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

4. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your students use?

Yes_5_ No_3_ Don't know_0_ Don't use_1_

b. The other school materials your students are exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc)?

Yes_5_ No_2_ Don't know_0_ Don't use_2_

c. Classroom discussion?

Yes_8_ No_1_ Don't know_0_ Don't use_0_

d. School library books?

Yes_9_ No_0_ Don't know_0_ Don't use_0_

5. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials? Yes_9_ No_0_ No opinion_0_

b. Classroom discussion? Yes_9_ No_0_ No opinion_0_

Comments: "Obviously school materials need to reflect change in society in order to be effective learning tools."

"Exposure to a variety of family compositions promotes tolerance of diversity."

"Children need to learn to accept various family compositions."

"Everyone wants to feel normal."

"Without this, students will have a more difficult time understanding what is going on in other students' lives."

"Children need to be aware that many children live in homes that are not the "traditional" situation."

III. COMMUNICATION

6. When referring to the adults your students live with, what terms do you use?

Terms Used	# of Respondants Who Use Each Term
(Ask the student)	1
Parents	6
Mom & Dad	1
Family	3

7. When contacting students' families, with whom do you typically communicate (e.g. mother, guardian, father, babysitter)?

Term Used	# of Respondants Who Use Each Term
Mom	7
Dad	4
Guardian	1
(First Name)	1
Step Dad	1
Parents	2

8. How would you describe the quality of that communication?

Excellent_5_ Adequate_4_ Unsatisfactory_0_

If you are unsatisfied with the quality of home/school communication, do you feel it is related to the student's family composition?

Yes_2_ No_7_ No opinion_0_

Comments: "A step-parent may not be as responsive. Also, when parents are living apart communication can get garbled when one reports to the other."

"I feel it is due to the family's history, school phobia, lack of trust in school personnel."

"Communication is the teacher's responsibility."

"(One) family is in turmoil - both parents are socially and emotionally retarded."

"Parents generally feel no news is good news so I make a point of reporting both kinds in a weekly log."

9. Can you identify particular family compositions that you are more comfortable communicating with?

	Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Uncomfortable
Both natural parents	9	0	0
Step parents	6	2	1
Foster/adoptive parents	5	2	2
Same sex parents	4	1	4
Single parent (mother only)	8	1	0
Single parent (father only)	7	1	1
Single parent with non-parent adult in the home	5	1	3
Non-parent relative	4	1	4

Comments: "It is usually easier to speak with (moms) since I am one myself and it is easier to speak with parents who have been with the child for a while."

"It hasn't actually happened - but I think I would feel uncomfortable."

"I can be uncomfortable if I perceive the parent is uncomfortable."

"It doesn't depend on the role - it depends on the individual. Since I live in the community I teach in, I know the parents in a variety of ways and feel comfortable with them."

IV. PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY COMPOSITIONS

10. Do you need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents	_0__
Step Parents	_0__
Single Parent (mother only)	_0__
Single Parent (father only)	_0__
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home	_2__
Foster/Adoptive Parents	_1__
Same Sex Parents	_2__
Non-Parent Relative	_4__

Comments: "I am uncomfortable with (same sex) parenting due to my own prejudices about what I consider as a proper parenting model."

"(I am) sometimes concerned that the partner of a parent is the inappropriate person to speak to due to confidentiality rules."

"The geater the frequency with which diverse families occur, the greater the ease of communication. For me, it's a matter of experience with the various compositions."

11. Do you feel that students' emotional or behavioral stability is closely linked to their family composition?

Yes _6_ No _3_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "Students that have the most problems at school have unstable home environments which is frequently (by my experience) linked to their family composition."

"Stability is the key factor."

"They are affected if there is conflict in the home. That may occur in any family group."

12. Do you feel that students' academic performance is closely linked to their family composition?

Yes _4_ No _4_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "Single parents frequently do not have the time to devote to children's interests, homework, behavior, etc."

"If students have a stable, accepting environment, I feel that the family's composition is not the key factor in academic performance."

13. Do you ...:

a. plan social events at school for only mother or father to attend with the child (for example, Breakfast with Dad, Mother and Daughter Dinner, etc.)?

Yes _0_ No _9_

b. ask your students to interview their mother/father for a class assignment?

Yes _4_ No _5_

c. ask your students to make presents for mother/father at school?

Yes _3_ No _6_

d. plan other activities for the adults your students live with?

Yes _6_ No _3_

Comments: "The school has a Grandparents'Day which is open to other senior family members, friends or mentors."

"Children are allowed to invite anyone they'd like for school functions or classroom activities or field trips."

"Parents were asked to spend a day in the kindergarten. A non-parent came in one instance."

14. Additional comments:

"You're dealing with a very difficult topic - Good luck on your project."

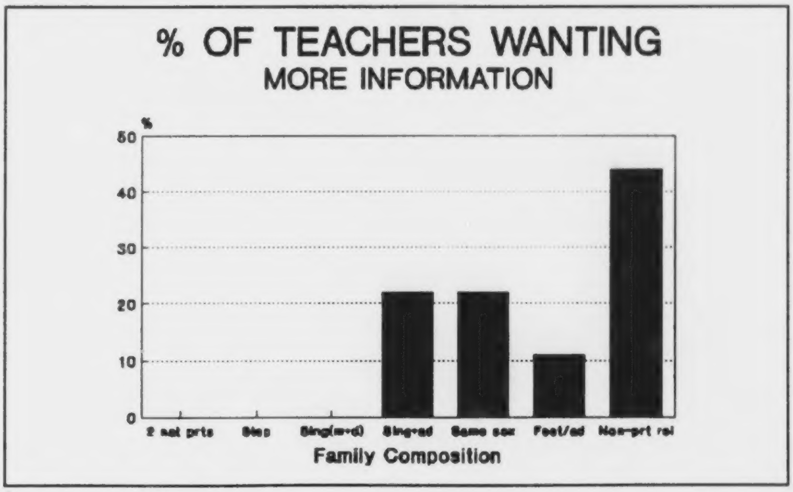
"I try hard to keep a close connection to home. I feel it is extremely important for parents to be an ally of the school."

Discussion

All respondants indicated that they knew the family compositions of their students and they felt it was important information to have. From the respondants' indications, there appears to be only limited diversity of family compositions represented within the suburban school; 66% of teachers indicated that between 75-100% of their students were from families that are made up of two natural parents, and all respondants indicated that between 1 and 24% of their students come from step families. Approximately 45% of respondants indicated that 1-24% of their students came from single parent households (with or without a non-parent adult in the home). Eighty-nine per cent of teachers stated that they had no students in their class from the following compositions: Foster/adoptive, same sex, and non-parent relative.

Sixty-three per cent of teachers felt that the textbooks they used were inclusive of alternative family compositions, 71% felt that school materials were inclusive, and 89% believed that their classroom discussion was inclusive. Their opinions of texts and materials being inclusive were somewhat higher than the total presented in the summary of all teachers surveyed, while classroom discussion was lower. All thought that library books were inclusive. Every respondant felt that representation of alternative compositions was important, with additional comments such as: "Obviously school materials need to reflect change in society in order to be effective learning tools"; "Exposure to a variety of family compositions promotes tolerance of diversity".

Sixty-seven per cent of respondants used the term "parents" when referring to the adults in their students' homes; 33% use the term "family"; with very few other terms suggested. All respondants felt that the quality of their communication was adequate to excellent, with only 22% indicating that poor communication was related to family composition (this figure being well below the summary of all schools figure of 50%). Indications were that teachers from this school were least comfortable communicating with same sex or non-parent adult families, with 56% indicating discomfort with each of these; while the majority stated that they were comfortable communicating with two (natural) parent households (100%), single mothers (89%), and single fathers (78%). Overall, teachers from the suburban school did not want information on the various family compositions:

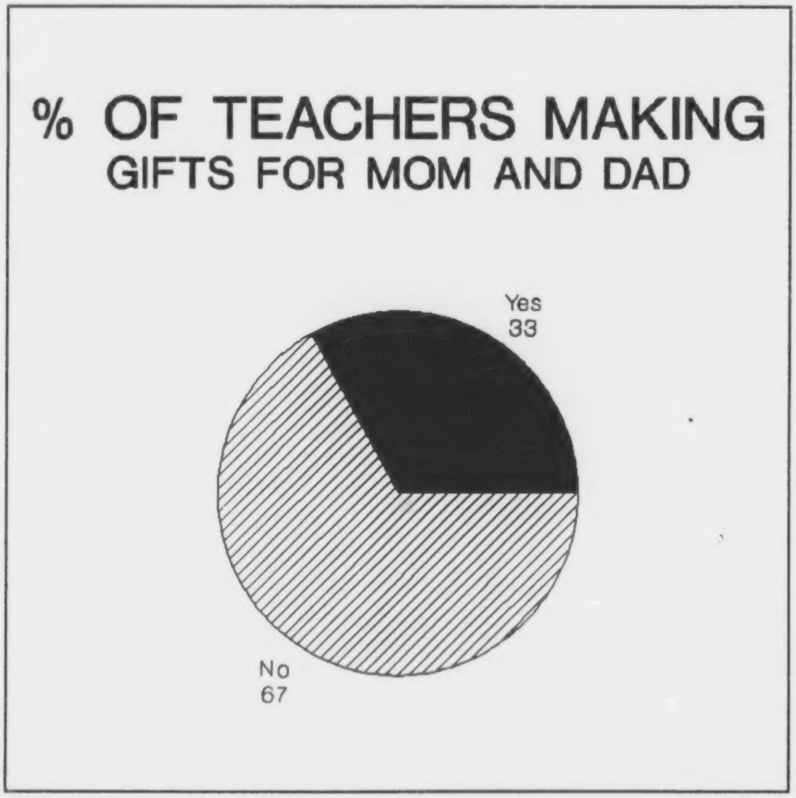


There is a significant discrepancy between comfort levels and desire for more information in the following two compositions: Same sex (56% of teachers were not comfortable communicating with this composition, while only 22% wanted more information), and foster/adoptive (44% stating they were uncomfortable with this composition, yet only 11% wanted more information).

Sixty-seven per cent of respondants felt that a child's emotional/behavioral stability was linked to his/her family composition, with comments indicating a range in their reasoning: "Students that have the most problems at school have unstable home environments, which is frequently (by my experience) linked to their family composition"; "They are affected if there is conflict in the home. That may occur in any family group". Fifty per cent of respondants felt that a student's academic performance was closely linked to their family composition, again with a range of reasoning, as can be seen in the following comments: "Single parents frequently do not have the time to devote to children's interests, homework, behavior, etc"; "If students have a stable, accepting environment, I feel that the family's composition is not the key factor in academic performance."

No teachers plan social events for only mom or dad to attend, while 67% plan other activities for the adults in their students' lives (as shown in the chart on the following page), such as "Grandparents' Day" for elder members of the community

(Note: Although this is an alternative activity, not specifically targeted at mothers or fathers, it is felt by researchers to still be somewhat exclusive in its title which connotates a biological relationship. It is recommended to continue this event, using a more inclusive title, such as "Elders' Day"). Another comment indicated inclusiveness of others in events: "Children are allowed to invite anyone they'd like for school functions or classroom activities or field trips".



Small Rural School

Raw Data

(Total respondants = 2)

Grade Levels: K-4: 2 5-8: 0 9-12: 0

I. STUDENT INFORMATION

1. Do you know the current family compositions of your students?

   Yes_2_ No_0_

2. Please indicate the percentage of your students you believe come from the following family compositions:

% bands of students from various compositions

	0	1-24	25-49	50-74	75-100
Both Natural Parents	0	0	0	0	2
Step Family	0	2	0	0	0
Single Parent (mother only)	1	1	0	0	0
Single Parent (father only)	1	1	0	0	0
Single Parent with non-parent	1	1*	0	0	0
Foster/Adoptive Parents	1	1	0	0	0
Same Sex Parents	2	0	0	0	0
Non-Parent Relative	1	1	0	0	0

* Note: Due to the complexity of representing the responses visually, an attempt will be made to explain the charted information through a narrative form. The percentage bands atop each column refer to the (estimated) percent of children within each surveyed teacher's classroom which come from each of the family compositions listed on the left of the chart. The figures within each column indicate the number of respondants that had that percent of students from each composition. For example, the figure 1 highlighted in the chart indicates that 1 of the 2 teacher respondants believe that between 1-24% of their students came from a household composed of a single parent with non-parent adult living in the home.

3. Do you feel it is important information to have?

Yes_2_ No_0_ No Opinion_0_

Comments: "Planning after school activities or Saturday activities, be sensitive to a possiblity of changes, ie child may have conflicting sets of values to learn."

"This information helps us understand the child and better meet his/her needs."

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

4. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your students use?

Yes_1_ No_1_ Don't know_0_ Don't use_0_

b. The other school materials your students are exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc)?

Yes_2_ No_0_ Don't know_0_ Don't use_0_

c. Classroom discussion?

Yes_2_ No_0_ Don't know_0_ Don't use_0_

d. School library books?

Yes_2_ No_0_ Don't know_0_ Don't use_0_

5. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials? Yes_2_ No_0_ No opinion_0_

b. Classroom discussion? Yes_2_ No_0_ No opinion_0_

Comments: "Children's family experiences need to be validated and affirmed."

"Children need to feel their situation is positive, not uncommon, and one of many possibilities."

III. COMMUNICATION

6. When referring to the adults your students live with, what terms do you use?

Terms Used	# of Respondants Who Use Each Term
Ask the student	1
Parents	1
Mom & Dad	1
Family	1

7. When contacting students' families, with whom do you typically communicate (e.g. mother, guardian, father, babysitter)?

Term Used	# of Respondants Who Use Each Term
Parents	2

8. How would you describe the quality of that communication?

Excellent_1_ Adequate_1_ Unsatisfactory_0_

If you are unsatisfied with the quality of home/school communication, do you feel it is related to the student's family composition?

Yes_1_ No_1_ No opinion_0_

Comments: "Families differ in their desire to know about a child's school experience. Their support of the child and the school varies."

9. Can you identify particular family compositions that you are more comfortable communicating with?

	Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Uncomfortable
Both natural parents	2	0	0
Step parents	2	0	0
Foster/adoptive parents	2	0	0
Same sex parents	2	0	0
Single parent (mother only)	2	0	0
Single parent (father only)	2	0	0
Single parent with non-parent adult in the home	2	0	0
Non-parent relative	2	0	0

Comments: "At first I would feel uncomfortable with same sex parents because I've never encountered them. It would be the same with oriental parents, etc."

"As long as we can openly and positively communicate for the benefit of the child, I'm comfortable with the range of caregivers."

IV. PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY COMPOSITIONS

10. Do you need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents _1__
Step Parents _1__
Single Parent (mother only) _1__
Single Parent (father only) _1__
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home _2__
Foster/Adoptive Parents _2__
Same Sex Parents _1__
Non-Parent Relative _1__

Comments: "I need to know how much responsibility the non-parent adult has, legally, etc. and my experience working with same sex parents is very limited."

"ALL - The family has changed greatly - I find myself assuming more and more."

11. Do you feel that students' emotional or behavioral stability is closely linked to their family composition?

Yes _0_ No _2_ No opinion _0_

Comments: "I think that it's more important for the family to be a loving, nurturing, stable and composed environment with healthy, mature adult(s) as "parents"."

12. Do you feel that students' academic performance is closely linked to their family composition?

Yes _1_ No _1_ No opinion _0_

13. Do you ...:

a. plan social events at school for only mother or father to attend with the child (for example, Breakfast with Dad, Mother and Daughter Dinner, etc.)?

Yes _0_ No _2_

b. ask your students to interview their mother/father for a class assignment?

Yes _1_ No _1_

c. ask your students to make presents for mother/father at school?

Yes _2_ No _0_

d. plan other activities for the adults your students live with?

Yes _2_ No _0_

Comments: "We focus our invitations to performances, concerts, dinners, etc. to all family members and the non-parent citizen population of our town."

14. Additional comments: "Families are impacted by working parents, VCR's, TV, food, money and the composition of families."

Discussion

Both respondants from the small rural school said that they knew the family compositions of their students and that this was important information to have. As is clearly indicated, most of their students come from family compositions made up of both natural parents; a few from step families; with very few from other compositions (none from same sex).

Both respondants stated that school materials, classroom discussion and school library books were inclusive of alternative families (a higher proportion than that of other schools surveyed); and one of the two indicated that the texts they used were inclusive. Both felt it was important for alternative compositions to be included in all of these things: "Children's family experiences need to be validated and affirmed"; "Children need to feel their situation is positive, not uncommon, and one of many possibilities".

Respondants indicated that the terms they used to refer to parent/caregivers were similar to those in the summary. Communication was thought to be good with homes (one excellent, one adequate), and one out of the two respondants felt it was related to the student's composition.

Uniquely, both respondants claimed to be comfortable with all family compositions: "At first I would feel uncomfortable with same sex parents because I've never encountered them. It would be the same with oriental parents, etc"; "As long as we can openly and positively communicate for the benefit of the child, I am comfortable with the range of caregivers". At the same time, the respondants reacted positively to the idea of having more information about the various family compositions, with their desire for information being most apparent with single parent with non-parent adult and foster/adoptive families (both respondants naming these two). All other family compositions, including both natural parents, were included: "ALL - The family has changed greatly - I find myself assuming more and more"; "I need to know how much responsibility the non-parent adult has, legally, etc, and my experience working with same sex parents is very limited".

Both respondants indicated that they did not link a child's family lifestyle with their emotional/behavioral stability; though one did believe there was a connection with academic performance: "I think that it's more important for the family to be a loving, nurturing, stable and composed environment with healthy, mature adult(s) as "parents"".

As was the case in the summary of the teacher surveys, both respondants indicated that they did not plan social events at school for only mother and father to attend. At the same time, both respondants also indicated asking students to make presents for mother and father at school.

TEXTBOOKS - SUMMARY

ALL SCHOOLS

Raw Data

SUMMARY OF STORY BOOKS REVIEWED (4 in total)

Total # of units: **154** # dealing with family: **47** % **31**

Total # of pages:**1505** # dealing with family:**542** % **36**

Terms used to refer to caregiver	Frequency	% of total	Frequency of Illustrations	% of total
Mother	**265**	**41**	**24**	**28**
Father	**267**	**42**	**20**	**24**
Parents	**32**	**5**	**23**	**27**
Grandparents	**74**	**11**	**17**	**20**
Uncle	**9**	**1**	**1**	**1**

	Frequency of Reference		% of total	Frequency & Nature of Reference		
Family Composition	Imp	Exp		Pos	Indif	Neg
Both natural parents	**0**	**22**	**42**	**21**	**1**	**0**
Step parents	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Single parent (mother)	**12**	**4**	**31**	**5**	**3**	**8**
Single parent (father)	**8**	**0**	**15**	**7**	**1**	**2**
Single parent + adult	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Foster/adoptive	**1**	**0**	**2**	**0**	**1**	**0**
Same sex	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Non-parent relative	**4**	**1**	**10**	**4**	**0**	**1**

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEXTS REVIEWED (2 in total)

Since the results of the social studies texts review could not be tabulated in the same way as the story books (due to the difference in format), they are presented in an alternative form:

Family Composition	Frequency of Reference	% of Total
Two-parent families	**14**	**78**
Single Mother Only	**2**	**11**
Single Father Only	**2**	**11**

All representations were of either a positive or indifferent nature. All "alternative" representations were implicit, while all but one two-parent families compositions were made explicit.

SUMMARY OF HEALTH TEXTS REVIEWED (2 in total)

Total # of units: **42** # dealing with family: **2** % **5**

Total # of pages: **562** # dealing with family: **18** % **3**

Terms used to refer to caregiver	Frequency	% of total	Frequency of Illustrations	% of total
Mother	**13**	**23**	**0**	**0**
Father	**13**	**23**	**0**	**0**
Parents	**16**	**28**	**0**	**0**
Grandparents	**7**	**13**	**0**	**0**
Adopted	**2**	**4**	**0**	**0**
Guardian	**2**	**4**	**0**	**0**
Step-parents	**4**	**7**	**0**	**0**

No illustrations were of significance with regard to family composition. Family lifestyles were presented indifferently as examples of alternative compositions.

TEXT NAME: **TEN TIMES ROUND** YEAR: **1982**

TEXT TYPE: **STORY BOOK** PUBLISHER: **GINN & CO.**

Total # of units: **33** # dealing with family: **13** % **39**

Total # of pages: **321** # dealing with family: **142** % **44**

Terms used to refer to caregiver	Frequency	% of total	Frequency of Illustrations	% of total
Mother	**93**	**38%**	**6**	**27%**
Father	**138**	**57%**	**10**	**45%**
Parents	**0**	**0**	**4**	**18%**
Grandparents	**13**	**5%**	**2**	**10%**

Family Composition	Frequency of Reference Imp	Exp	% of total	Frequency & Nature of Reference Pos	Indif	Neg
Both natural parents	**0**	**8**	**53**	**8**	**0**	**0**
Step parents	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Single parent (mother)	**5**	**0**	**33**	**2**	**1**	**2**
Single parent (father)	**1**	**0**	**7**	**1**	**0**	**0**
Single parent + adult	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Foster/adoptive	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Same sex	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Non-parent relative	**0**	**1**	**7**	**1**	**0**	**0**

TEXT NAME: **MYSTERY SNEAKER** YEAR: **1982**

TEXT TYPE: **STORY BOOK** PUBLISHER: **GINN & CO.**

Total # of units: **32** # dealing with family: **9** % **28**

Total # of pages: **305** # dealing with family: **89** % **29**

Terms used to refer to caregiver	Frequency	% of total	Frequency of Illustrations	% of total
Mother	**17**	**33%**	**1**	**14%**
Father	**13**	**25%**	**0**	**0%**
Parents	**5**	**10%**	**4**	**57%**
Grandparents	**8**	**15%**	**1**	**14%**
Uncle	**9**	**17%**	**1**	**14%**

Family Composition	Frequency of Reference Imp	Exp	% of total	Frequency & Nature of Reference Pos	Indif	Neg
Both natural parents	**0**	**5**	**45%**	**5**	**0**	**0**
Step parents	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Single parent (mother)	**2**	**1**	**27%**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Single parent (father)	**2**	**0**	**18%**	**1**	**0**	**1**
Single parent + adult	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Foster/adoptive	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Same sex	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Non-parent relative	**1**	**0**	**9%**	**1**	**0**	**0**

TEXT NAME: **CLEARING PATHS** YEAR: **1986**

TEXT TYPE: **STORY BOOK** PUBLISHER: **HEATH**

Total # of units: **54** # dealing with family: **14** % **26**

Total # of pages: **516** # dealing with family: **176** % **34**

Terms used to refer to caregiver	Frequency	% of total	Frequency of Illustrations	% of total
Mother	84	48	2	20
Father	60	30	4	40
Parents	14	8	1	10
Grandparents	24	14	3	30

	Frequency of Reference		% of total	Frequency & Nature of Reference		
Family Composition	Imp	Exp		Pos	Indif	Neg
Both natural parents	0	4	27	3	1	0
Step parents	0	0	0	0	0	0
Single parent (mother)	1	3	27	0	1	3
Single parent (father)	4	0	27	2	1	1
Single parent + adult	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foster/adoptive	1	0	7	0	1	0
Same sex	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-parent relative	2	0	12	1	0	1

TEXT NAME: **GOLDEN SECRETS** YEAR: **1981**

TEXT TYPE: **STORY BOOK** PUBLISHER: **SCOTT, FORESMAN**

Total # of units: **35** # dealing with family: **11** % **31**

Total # of pages: **363** # dealing with family: **135** % **37**

Terms used to refer to caregiver	Frequency	% of total	Frequency of Illustrations	% of total
Mother	**71**	**42**	**15**	**33**
Father	**56**	**33**	**6**	**13**
Parents	**13**	**8**	**14**	**30**
Grandparents	**29**	**17**	**11**	**24**

Family Composition	Frequency of Reference Imp	Exp	% of total	Frequency & Nature of Reference Pos	Indif	Neg
Both natural parents	**0**	**5**	**45**	**5**	**0**	**0**
Step parents	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Single parent (mother)	**4**	**0**	**36**	**2**	**0**	**2**
Single parent (father)	**1**	**0**	**9**	**1**	**0**	**0**
Single parent + adult	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Foster/adoptive	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Same sex	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Non-parent relative	**1**	**0**	**9**	**1**	**0**	**0**

TEXT NAME: **COMMUNITIES** YEAR: **1985**

TEXT TYPE: **SOCIAL STUDIES** PUBLISHER: **HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH**

Of the 8 families shown to represent different communities, the representation of family compositions was as follows:

5 were explicitly two-parent families (p 1, 52, 61, 72, 109)

1 was implicitly a single father family (p 88)

2 were implicitly single mother families (p 97, 140)

All were presented in an unbiassed manner.

TEXT NAME: **AMERICA TODAY AND YESTERDAY** YEAR: **1978**

TEXT TYPE: **SOCIAL STUDIES** PUBLISHER: **MACMILLAN**

Of the 10 families shown to demonstrate how communities are first formed, the representation of family compositions was as follows:

8 were explicitly two-parent families
1 was implicitly a two-parent family
1 was implicitly a single father family

All were presented in an unbiased manner.

TEXT NAME: **FOCUS ON YOU (#1)** YEAR: **1990**

TEXT TYPE: **HEALTH** PUBLISHER: **MERRILL**

Total # of units: **20** # dealing with family: **1** % **5**

Total # of pages: **262** # dealing with family: **9** % **3**

Terms used to refer to caregiver	Frequency	% of total	Frequency of Illustrations	% of total
Mother	**13**	**29**	**0**	**0**
Father	**13**	**29**	**0**	**0**
Parents	**8**	**18**	**0**	**0**
Grandparents	**4**	**9**	**0**	**0**
Adopted	**2**	**4**	**0**	**0**
Guardian	**1**	**2**	**0**	**0**
Step-parents	**4**	**9**	**0**	**0**

Family Composition	Frequency of Reference Imp	Exp	% of total	Frequency & Nature of Reference Pos	Indif	Neg
Both natural parents						
Step parents			**N/A**			
Single parent (mother)						
Single parent (father)						
Single parent + adult						
Foster/adoptive						
Same sex						
Non-parent relative						

TEXT NAME: **FOCUS ON YOU (#2)** YEAR: **1990**

TEXT TYPE: **HEALTH** PUBLISHER: **MERRILL**

Total # of units: **22** # dealing with family: **1** % **5**

Total # of pages: **300** # dealing with family: **9** % **3**

Terms used to refer to caregiver	Frequency	% of total	Frequency of Illustrations	% of total
Mother	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Father	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Parents	**8**	**67**	**0**	**0**
Grandparents	**3**	**25**	**0**	**0**
Guardian	**1**	**8**	**0**	**0**

Family Composition	Frequency of Reference		% of total	Frequency & Nature of Reference		
	Imp	Exp		Pos	Indif	Neg
Both natural parents						
Step parents			**N/A**			
Single parent (mother)						
Single parent (father)						
Single parent + adult						
Foster/adoptive						
Same sex						
Non-parent relative						

Discussion

A total of eight textbooks were randomly selected for analysis from the three target schools. Initially, it was anticipated to have one story book (ie general reader), one health and one social studies text from each school, but these were not always available. As a result, two story books and one social studies text were obtained from the medium suburban school and no health text was reviewed from the small rural school. The large urban school provided one example text from each of the three content areas. All of the texts analyzed were taken from grade 3/4 classrooms and were in use at the time this study was being undertaken. Parameters for analysis were broadly established within the same frameworks used in the studies cited in the literature review (Britton & Lumpkin, 1983; Evans, 1982; Nolan et al, 1984) and so for the purposes of this study, units that were determined to be "family" oriented were limited to those that dealt directly with human relations (i.e. not animals), and those that included adult:child relationships (i.e. not those which included only peer relations).

Four story books (i.e. general readers) were reviewed. Of a total of 1505 pages analyzed, 542 pages (or 36%) dealt with issues around the family. It was determined that 42% of all family oriented units centered upon two-parent families. All of these references were explicit (ie the text made clear that both natural parents were in the household). Thirty-one per cent of families appeared to be single mothers, fifteen per cent single fathers, and the remaining 10 per cent non-parent relative compositions. Twenty-four of the twenty-nine units (ie 83%) that were comprised of these three compositions however, were not explicit in the nature of the family involved (for example, if a unit was determined by the researchers to implicitly be a single mother household, this determination was based on the reference only to the mother in the story; with no mention of any other adult being present).

The frequency of each of the terms used was similarly tabulated. Of the five terms that were used in these texts to refer to the adult(s) perceived as the primary caregivers, the breakdown was as follows: "mother" (or similar term, such as "mom", "mommy") was used 41% of the time; "father" (or equivalent) was used 42% of the time; "parents" 5%; "grandparents" 11%; and "uncle 1%. No other terms were used when reference was made to primary caregivers.

Of the 85 illustrations accompanying the text that represented caregiver(s) and child(ren) together, 28% depicted mother and child; 24% depicted father and child; 27% portrayed both parents and child; 20% showed grandparent(s) and child; and just 1% showed uncle and child.

Two social studies texts were analyzed for their inclusivity of alternative family compositions. Since their format differed from that of the story books, relationships were tabulated in a less detailed manner. Of the 18 units that made reference to families, 78% were found to center upon two-parent compositions, 11% appeared to represent single mother families, and the remaining 11% appeared to show single father families. In these books, no alternative family composition was made explicit through either text or illustration, while 13 of the 14 that were considered two-parent compositions were made explicit. All representations and references to families in these social studies texts were either indifferent or positive.

Finally, two health texts were reviewed. It was found that only 2 of the total 42 units (ie 5%) dealt with the concept of family. Represented as a proportion of the total number of pages reviewed, this means that only 3% (ie 18 out of 562 pages) dealt with "family". A wider variety of terms were included when discussing adult caregivers than was present in the story or social study books. "Mother" was used 23% of the time; "father" 22%; "parents" 28%; "grandparents" 13%; "adopted" 4%; "step-parents" 7%; and "guardian" 4%. Family lifestyles were presented without judgment as examples of alternative compositions. No illustrations were of significance with regard to family composition.

Implications

The results obtained from the analysis of story books suggest some major implications for the use of such books in schools. Although only 42% of units that dealt with "family" appear to deal with two-parent family compositions, this figure is somewhat misleading. Every one of these families was explicitly presented as a two-parent household, while only 17% of the remaining compositions were made clear. Rather than be clearly stated as a single parent household, for example, many of these units simply neglected to make any reference to other significant adults in the home, choosing instead to simply focus on one relationship between an adult caregiver and a child. The overall tone of these texts was consequently perceived by the researchers to be strongly geared towards traditional families, with a focus on two-parent:child and mother:child relationships. Thus, in terms of explicit representation, alternative families appear to be almost entirely absent from the content of story books currently in use in classrooms at the three/four grade level. The significance of such a non-agenda for alternative family compostions in the textbooks children read was discussed at length in the literature review (Apple, 1985; Peretz, 1990), so suffice it to state at this point that this omission may impact greatly on a child's self-esteem and school performance.

A second major finding is of equal or greater importance. Even if one allows for those compositions that deal with a single caregiver:child relationship to be representing an alternative family (eg in a story with only a mother:daughter relationship represented, one makes the unsubstantiated assumption that this indicates a single mother household), the nature of these representations is markedly different from those of the two-parent families. Twenty-one of the twenty-two (ie 95.5%) two-parent families represented were shown in a very positive light. For example, in the text, Ten Times Round, the unit titled, "Pictures at the Airport" depicts two parents who are very concerned for the welfare of their children, with accompanying illustrations showing the parents and children holding hands, with the remaining family presented in an indifferent manner. Compare this with the fact that 11 of the 30 other units (that implicitly or explicitly represent alternative families) present a generally negative impression of these families, as defined by the nature of the adult:child relationships and the storylines themselves. For example, in the text, Mystery Sneaker, the unit titled, "The Moon Singer" tells of a single mother who cannot care for her son and so leaves him on the doorstep of a (married) couple who unwillingly "adopt" the child, treat him cruelly and use him to make money, before finally giving him to a second "adoptive" couple who are more supportive and positive. For such a high proportion of alternative families to be presented in these negative and stereotypical ways, this clearly has severe implications for both the self-concept of children from those compositions; and the perception of these children by their peers.

The illustrations may be of increased benefit to children from single parent compositions, since the pictures alone frequently depict only one adult with the child, which may be interpreted as single-parent situations, and therefore be more inclusive. However, the nature of those illustrations is not always positive, and so the risk of presenting stereotypical images is higher (eg in the text, Clearing Paths, the unit titled, "The Street of the Flower Boxes" depicts a grandmother as the (implicit) head of household as being very stern and hard in appearance).

The main implication to be drawn from the analysis of health and social studies texts focuses upon the under-representation of alternative families, rather than the nature of their portrayal. Only 3% of the pages reviewed in the two health books are concerned with the concept of "family". Within this, 74% of reference terms used were either "mother", "father" or "parents". Adoption was mentioned only twice, the term "guardian" was referred to only twice, and step-families were referenced only four times. Fourteen of the eighteen units in the social studies books that presented families, are centered upon two-parent families. Of the remainder, only single parents are represented (ie no other form of alternative composition).

In summary, the texts reviewed are starkly under-representative of alternative family compositions. Story books rarely make explicit reference to alternative families, and even when this is implied through text and storyline, alternative families tend to be portrayed negatively and stereotypically. Social studies and health texts, which have been asserted through the literature review to frequently form the basis of teaching in these content areas through the elementary grades (Gross & Dynneson, 1983; Klein & Smith, 1985) appear similarly to have minimal referencing of alternative family compositions, with several compositions not being represented at all (eg same sex, non-parent adult).

Recommendations

1) Due to the apparent prevailing focus on traditional families in story books, health and social study texts at the elementary level, it is recommended that educators and parent/caregivers seek texts that are more inclusive than are currently being used. If such texts are not available at present, it is recommended that educators, parent/caregivers and the wider community lobby publishers to produce texts that are more inclusive.

2) Since alternative families appear to be negatively portrayed in many story books at the elementary level, it is recommended that educators make strong use of supplemental materials and discussion to provide positive representations of alternative family compositions. Once again, it is recommended that communities lobby publishers to ensure that it is society that drives curricula, not textbook manufacturers.

CURRICULA - SUMMARY

ALL SCHOOLS

Raw Data

Health Curricula -- objectives that relate to family:

Large Urban School

Grade K - Names trustworthy adults.
- Discusses ways family members can be helpful to each other.

Grade 1 - States effects of drugs and chemical dependency on the family.
- Names trustworthy adults.
- Tells about roles and interactions of persons within families and describes how family structures differ.

Grade 2 - Discusses the relationship between individual family, community, and peer groups.
- Tells about roles and interactions of persons within families and describes how family structres differ.

Grade 3 - Describes ways families change, including births and deaths.
- Tells about roles and interactions of persons within families and describes how family structures differ.

Grade 4 - Discusses alcoholism and chemical dependency as related to familes.

Grade 5 - Analyzes the variety of roles played by family members in meeting basic family needs.

- Describes family changes caused by death, divorce, moving, new member, drugs and alcohol.

Grade 6 - Describes what it's like to belong to a family with an alcoholic member.

Grade 7/8 - Describes some of the dynamics of living in a chemically dependent family.

- Discusses the concepts of sexual orientation (i.e. homosexuality, heterosexuality) and homophobia.

Medium Suburban School:

Grades K - 3 - Families take a variety of forms - how family members help each other.

- How families change (eg birth, loss divorce, moving).
- How families meet our basic needs: protection, food, clothing, love, education, shelter and care.

Grades 4 - 6 - Name how families and individuals grow.

- Communication (talking and listening) skills with friends and families.
- Families - discuss how individual needs and growth affect the family group dynamics.
- Discuss how families meet our basic needs.

- Discuss traditional and non-traditional roles in the family - how are these changing or not changing.
- Evaluate the effects of sex role expectations and stereotypes on family and peer relationships.

Grades 7 - 8 - Recognize the tasks for parenthood.

- Discuss the significance of one's family in the development of values, standards, and attitudes.
- Discuss the emotional stages encountered with changes in the family structure, and explore ways of coping with those changes.

Small Rural School:

Grade K - The student wiil be able to know families come in all shapes and sizes.

- The student will be able to know families change in different ways.
- The student will be able to know family members should work together and are courteous to one another.

Grade 1 - The student will be able to know that family members help one another in different ways.

- The student wil be able to know families grow and change in different ways.

Grade 2 - The student will be able to understand that there are many different kinds of families.

- The student will be able to understand that a family meets the basic needs of its members.
- The student will be able to understand families must work together to get their work done.
- The student will be able to understand families grow and change through adoption and foster care.

Grade 3 - The student will be able to understand that family members work together so they can enjoy one another.

- The student will be able to understand that a family is larger than those people who live in their house.
- The student will be able to get along with brothers and sisters.
- The student will be able to understand a family changes when a member leaves.

Grade 4 - The student will be able to understand family meetings.

- The student will be able to understand that moving affects the family.

Grade 5 - The student will be able to understand the birth order.

- The student will be able to understand parents concerns.
- The student will be able to understand a family member with a long term illness.

Grade 6 - The student will be able to understand family rituals.

- The student will be able to understand that parents and family members change too.

Grade 7 - The student will be able to understand how some family roles change over time and some are maintained.

- The student will be able to understand that family members' rights and responsibilites change.
- The student will be able to understand that parents and children frequently disagree on freedoms and responsibilities.

Grade 8 - The student will be able to understand that parents' perspective on life may be based on what they experienced in their lives.

- The student will be able to understand that caring for others is part of the responsibilites of mature family members.
- The student will be able to understand that family members are affected by what other family members do.

Social Studies Curricula - Objectives that relate to family:

Large Urban School:

Grade K - Family

- Names family members.
- Classifies family members as parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and other.
- Describes job and chore responsibilities of self and family members.

Medium Suburban school:

Grade K - Global aspects of family traditions.

- Name the members of his family.
- Recite cultural and family traditions associated with various holidays.
- Job and chore responsibilities of self and family members.
- Recite occupations of family members.

Grade 1 - Rules, beliefs, and customs influence behavior in family, school and community.

- Lifestyles.
- Be aware of different school and family structures.

Grade 2 - Rules, beliefs and customs influence behavior in family, school and community.

- Beliefs and values as related to family, school and neighborhood groups.
- Family structures and lifestyles.
- Family social and physical needs.
- Family communication, customs and habits.

Small Rural School: Not available.

Discussion

When available, formal written curricula in the areas of Health and Social Studies were reviewed for all three of the target schools. A total of three health curricula and two social studies curricula were reviewed for grades kindergarten through eight. The purpose of the analysis was to determine the presence of objectives relating to alternative family compositions, as well as to determine the nature of such representations (eg positive or negative).

In the area of health, the overall impression gained from the review was that the concept of family is covered extensively in all three curricula, with an adequate representation of a variety of family structures (eg "families come in all shapes and sizes"), a variety of roles within families, and changes within families based on birth, death, divorce, moving, and new members. Much of the content appeared to be applicable to both traditional and alternative family compositions, although the application to alternative family compositions may be somewhat vague and covert in nature, as can be seen in the topics listed above. On a few occasions specific "exclusive" terms were used, such as parents (usually always plural), brother and sister, but at the same time there were those objectives that clearly were "inclusive"--The student will understand that families grow and change through adoption and foster care; and the family is larger than the people who live in their house. It therefore can be concluded that the health curricula reviewed cover the topic of family extensively and present a variety of family compositions in covert, yet definite ways.

On the other hand, the two social studies curricula reviewed were limited in their coverage and representation of family in general. With so few objectives related to family, those that were there did not appear to be inclusive of a variety of family compositions or roles within families. Some mention was made of family structures and roles, yet it appeared to be very limited. In objectives where family members were referred to, very traditional terms were used, such as parents, brother, sister, grandparents aunt, etc. It therefore appears that social studies curricula do not extensively cover the topic of family, and when it is presented, it is done in a traditional way.

Implications

Of the two content area curricula reviewed, clearly one made attempts at being inclusive of a variety of family compositions, while the other was definitely not at all inclusive in nature. Formal written curricula are intended to be used as guides for school districts and classroom teachers to use in the planning of instruction, while much of the responsibility for the actual implementation of the specific skills and content is left up to the classroom teacher (or possibly textbook companies) to determine. With such apparent gaps in the "guides" being used in the three target schools, it would seem equally apparent that unless classroom teachers are using inclusive supplemental materials, students from alternative family compositions are potentially being left out as well. This has very strong implications for the need for change in this area, to ensure that the formal written curricula are inclusive in nature.

Recommendations

1) It is strongly recommended that parent/caregiver(s), school personnel and community members form committees to review current curricula (specifically health and social studies) being used in schools today, to determine the nature of the representation of the family and the inclusivity of alternative family compositions. When curricula are determined to be exclusive, the rewriting of such curricula should be undertaken, with input from a variety of parent/caregiver(s), school personnel and community members, to assure inclusivity.

SCHOOL CONTACT FORMS - SUMMARY

ALL SCHOOLS

Raw Data

<table>
<tr><th>School</th><th>Title of Form</th><th>Addressed to</th><th>Signature</th><th>Student: Caregiver References</th></tr>
<tr><td>Large Urban</td><td>**1.Registration/ Emergency**</td><td>N/A</td><td>N/A</td><td>Father
Mother
Guardian</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="4">Comments: + Does include Guardian
- Confusing form; open to interpretations
- Doesn't ask who the child lives with
+ Includes space for other information
+ Emergency section incudes "Relationship____"</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>**2.Health Record**</td><td>N/A</td><td>Parent/ Guardian</td><td>Father/ Guardian;
Mother/ Guardian</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="4">Comments: + Guardian section given equal space
- No room for change of parent/guardian
- Assumes mom & dad/guardians live with child
- Not inclusive of other significant adult
- Lists father and mother in home</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>**3.Home Language Survey**</td><td>Dear Parents/ Guardians</td><td>Parent/ Guardian</td><td>Your Child</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="4">Comments: + Refers to "your child"
+ Uses Parent/Guardian
- Assumes two adults in household
- Doesn't ask relationship to child
+ Inclusive of other relatives in home
- Not inclusive of non-relatives in home</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>**4.Educational Record Request**</td><td>N/A</td><td>Parent/ Guardian</td><td>N/A</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="4">Comments: + Uses Parent/Guardian
+ Doesn't assume two adults in home</td></tr>
</table>

School	Title of Form	Addressed to	Signature	Student: Caregiver References
Large Urban	**5.Chapter One Programming**	Dear Parents	Parent Signature	Your Child

Comments: + Refers to "your child"
- Dear Parent; Parent Signature

	6.Retention	N/A	Parent or Guardian	N/A

Comments: + Uses parent or guardian
- Refers to "My daughter/son"

	7.Suspension	Dear ________	Parent Signature	Daughter/ Son

Comments: + Uses "Dear______" to address individually
- Refers to daughter/son
- Parent signature

Medium Suburb	**8.Family Information**	Father/Mother	Parent	My child

Comments: - Uses mother's name, father's name
+ Asks for other adults to contact in case of emergency
- Assumes both parents in home
- Asks for parent signature

	9.Release of School Records	Parent/ Guardian	Parent/ Guardian	N/A

Comments: + Uses parent/guardian
+ Asks for parent/guardian signature

School	Title of Form	Addressed to	Signature	Student: Caregiver References
Medium Suburb	**10. Light's Retention Scale**	N/A	N/A	Parents

Comments: + Uses the term student
- Uses the term "parents"

Small Rural	**11. Biographical Information**	Parents	__________	Mother Father

Comments: + Blank space for signature
- Doesn't ask relationship to child
- Uses father's name; mother's name
- Asks for status of parents (exclusive of non-parents, confusing options listed)
+ Asks for others living in the home
- Assumes parents both in same home

	12. Emergency Information	N/A	Parent or Guardian	N/A

Comments: - Uses mother, father
+ Does include space for alternate address
- Asks "Where can parents be reached?"

	13. Health Questionnaire	N/A	__________ Relationship to Child	N/A

Comments: - Uses father's name, mother's name
+ Includes space for alternate address
+ More inclusive of marital status options
+ Uses Guardian's name
+ Uses "Student lives with_____"
+ Uses "Your child/this child"
+ Uses "In household"
+ Asks for name(s) of person(s) forbidden to have access to the child
+ Asks "Has this child experienced any social, emotional or physical problems which may affect adjustment to school?"

School	**Title of Form**	**Addressed to**	**Signature**	**Student: Caregiver References**
Small Rural	**14. Home Language Survey**	Dear Parents/ Guardians	N/A	Your Child

Comments: + Refers to "your child"
+ Uses Parent/Guardian
- Assumes two adults in household
- Doesn't ask relationship to child
+ Inclusive of other relatives in home
- Not inclusive of non-relatives in home

Discussion

In the initial development of this study, provision was made for an evaluation by the researchers of the inclusivity of health and registration forms currently being used by the three targeted schools. In practice, the school personnel that gathered the forms to be analyzed compiled a broader sampling than originally anticipated; so that the forms that provided the raw data for this study included an array of those that schools send to students' homes, and therefore may be referred to more generally as "school contact forms". A total of fourteen forms were obtained for analysis; seven from the large urban school, three from the medium-sized suburban school, and four from the small rural school.

Three of the fourteen forms were addressed exclusively to either "parents" or "mother/father"; three used the address, "Parent/guardian"; one allowed for individual, personal addressee(s); and the remaining seven included no form of opening address. Again, 3 forms closed using the term "parent"; 6 incorporated the term, "parent/guardian"; 2 left the relationship of the adult to the student open; and the remaining 3 forms required no signature and used no formal closure. With regard to the nature of student:caregiver references made in the body of the forms, 4 included "my/your child"; 3 referred to "mother/father/parents, daughter/son"; 2 included the term "guardian" as well as "parent"; and 5 made nor reference to this relationship in the text itself.

In general, the forms reviewed presented a very mixed picture with regard to inclusivity of alternative family compositions. Some forms contained very inclusive elements (see sample form, Appendix F) while others were very traditional in their format (ie addressed only "parents", referred only to "mother/father", see sample form, Appendix G). No forms made provision for or solicited relevant information on those parent/caregivers that do not have traditional roles or titles within families; while some were sensitive to the nature of the relationship(s) between the parent/caregiver and the child, by not assuming it was their son or daughter (eg using "your child" as an alternative form of reference). Overall, it appears that the forms being used in the three target schools are not consistently inclusive of alternative family compositions.

Implications

The fact that the majority of the school contact forms do not appear to be inclusive of alternative family compositions has strong implications for the need for change. One of the most significant implications would be that these forms could potentially be the first contact that parent/caregiver(s) may have with the school, and therefore the first impression. Obviously, it would be helpful if that first impression was positive in nature, but if the forms are not fully inclusive of a variety of family compositions, then an immediate distance or wall could be created between the school and the family; one which may be difficult to change.

Another implication may be, with the present construction of forms, it is possible that pertinent information may be left out (eg in forms that omit space for significant adults that do not fit the traditional role or title within the family, then in cases of emergency, they would not be contacted and the safety of the child could be jeopardized).

Recommendations

1) It is recommended that school contact forms be more inclusive in their construction, to allow for all parent/ caregivers to be represented and acknowledged, as well as the unique nature of their relationship to the student (refer to draft example form, Appendix E).

2) It is recommended that registration and/or student information forms be updated at least annually and provisions be made for changes in family composition that may occur within the school year.

3) It is recommended that school contact forms allow space for parent/caregivers to include any additional information they feel is important.

4) It is recommended that once a school determines which inclusive terms will be used to refer to parent/caregivers and the nature of their relationship with the student, that those terms remain consistent in the forms used as well as the written communication to students' households.

CONCLUSIONS

> Nontraditional families hunger to
> hear that 'family' means people who
> care about each other and are in
> committed, intimate relationships
> to one another.
>
> (Networker, 1991, p.47)

This study provided a wealth of information to analyze; identifying both areas of concern with regard to the visibility and acceptance of alternative families within public schools, as well as some positive aspects of inclusivity and sensitivity. From the outset, this study was viewed by the researchers to be of extreme significance and one worthy of attention. This notion was strongly evidenced by the fact that respondants (both parent/caregivers and teachers) expressed thanks and appreciation for addressing the topic. This feedback supported the need for this and further research with regard to the issues presented.

Having presented the raw data obtained through the three strands of the research (parent/caregiver(s) perspectives, teacher perspectives, and analyses of textbooks, curricula and forms); and proposing implications based on the findings and recommendations for change in specific areas, conclusions can now be drawn that address the questions raised in the statement of the problem. From the information provided, it is now the intention to identify specific areas of agreement and discrepancy within the three strands in order to found our final recommendations, in the hopes that this study will be used to initiate change with regard to the visibility and acceptance of all students' families and/or households in public schools today.

In attempting to answer the question, how aware are educators of the presence of alternative family compositions, as posed in the statement of the problem, both educators and parent/caregivers clearly stated that teachers were largely aware of the family compositions of their students. With few exceptions, teachers and parent/caregivers believed that this was very important information for teachers to have, as long as it was used only in the best interest of the child. The most outstanding conclusion in this area appears to be the need for a definite, established means of transmitting such information, and that this is the responsibility of both educators and parent/caregivers.

A significant conclusion to be drawn from this part of the research--and one which was not identified as a focus of this study in the statement of the problem--is that parent/caregivers do not appear to be well informed about the textbook content, materials and classroom activities in schools today. Almost 50% clearly indicated that they did not know whether a variety of family compositions were included in the textbooks, other school materials and classroom discussion that their children were exposed to in school. Of those that did indicate an awareness, 72% stated that texts were not inclusive; 50% stated that other materials used were not inclusive; and 37% stated that classroom discussion was not inclusive of alternative family compositions.

When comparing these figures with teacher responses, educators appear to perceive texts, materials used and classroom discussion to be more inclusive than do parent/caregivers (50% stated that texts were inclusive, 60% school materials, and 96% classroom discussion). The vast majority of parent/caregivers indicated that school library books were inclusive, as did all teachers. Results suggest that parent/caregivers and teachers strongly advocate for inclusion of alternative families in all of these areas.

The independent review of (eight) textbooks to determine the inclusivity of a variety of family compositions, overwhelmingly concluded that textbooks in use today in the three target schools appear non-inclusive; rather they are stikingly exclusive. Almost without exception, those family compositions that were explicitly represented were two-parent families. Rarely was it explicitly stated in the texts that other family compositions were being used as the focus of the unit; the reader having to imply such meaning through the lack of reference to a father (in the case of an implied single mother family), or parents (in the case of an implied grandparent-headed family), and so on. There was also a striking differentiation between the nature of representation of each family composition; two-parent families were always portrayed positively, while other family compositions were sometimes negatively portrayed. Same sex families and single parent with non-parent adult were never represented, either explicitly or implicitly.

From the independent analysis of health and social studies curricula, it seems clear that the concept of the family is being taught extensively in health curricula, while it receives little focus in social studies, particularly beyond the primary grades. After reviewing general objectives in the area of health, the uniqueness of family structures and roles within families is clearly incorporated; but the extent to which each family composition is taught cannot be determined through this research. Overall though, it does appear that in the health curricula reviewed an attempt is being made to be clear about the purpose and unique nature of families today. Conversely, it appears that very little attention is being given to the concept of family in social studies curricula.

The above area addresses the statement of the problem questions, how is the concept of family being presented in schools; and how are alternative family compositions represented in textbooks, health and social studies curricula, and other materials. Clearly, a concept of the family is being presented through textbooks, other materials, classroom discussion and school library books. Although this is true, this presentation does not always appear to be inclusive of a variety of family compositions, especially with regard to the textbooks used.

Support for this position can be drawn from all three strands of the study (parent/caregiver(s) perceptions, teacher perceptions, and the independent text analysis).

Parent/caregivers that were surveyed in this study clearly felt that school contact forms currently being used were not inclusive of their family compositions. Of the twenty-nine respondants that expressed an opinion on this issue, twenty-one (ie 72.4%) stated that the forms they received from schools did not allow for their family compositions to be represented. The independent review of sample forms used by the three target schools fully supported this opinion; some were exclusive of all but traditional families, several contained elements that were more inclusive, but no form reviewed by the researchers could be considered fully inclusive of all alternative family compositions.

As indicated by the teachers surveyed, the terms most frequently used to refer to the adults their students live with are: Parents, dad and mom, which in the opinion of the researchers, are not fully inclusive of the wide variety of parent/caregivers present in schools today. Although 76% of the parent/caregivers surveyed felt that they were being addressed in an acceptable way, 24% (or 1 in 4) clearly felt they were not.

Overall, communication between home and school was felt by both educators and parent/caregivers to be at least adequate, if not better. The key factors for good communication appear to be the investment of family members and the stability of the home environment, as perceived by educators in particular. Although this is true, many educators indicated that they were only somewhat comfortable or clearly uncomfortable communicating with some of the alternative family compositions, particularly same sex families (50%), non-parent relative families (46%), and foster/adoptive families (38%).

Despite the fact that such a high percentage of educators indicated discomfort in communicating with various alternative family compositions, a surprisingly low percentage indicated the need for more information. Over 50% of the respondants stated that they did not want any information at all, while others indicated varying levels of interest in obtaining more information on specific compositions (46% wanted information on non-parent relatives; 33% on same sex; and 25% on foster/adoptive families). In the comments, some teachers indicated being more comfortable with the family compositions they were most familiar with (ie familiarity/information = comfort), yet the interest in becoming more informed was generally very low. This may indicate the overall lack of desire by some educators to change and become more comfortable communicating with alternative family compositions. The perceived need for educators to have more information about alternative family compositions was clearly supported by parent/caregivers.

In attempting to answer the question, how informed are educators about the nature of (alternative) families, it seems that educators themselves feel they are adequately informed. As perceived by parent/caregivers however, educators are in need of further information, especially so with regard to some of the presently emerging family compositions. Educators themselves present a dichotomy of opinion with regard to the level of information they presently have. As stated above, some educators indicated a lack of comfort in dealing with certain family compositions; while at the same time they recognize that they are more comfortable with those compositions they are most informed about. Their recognized lack of comfort therefore, may indeed point to a lack of information.

When asked to comment on the general attitudes of school personnel towards their family compositions, 54% of parent/caregivers who expressed an opinion described attitudes as positive. However, almost 20% (ie one in five) indicated that there were prevailing negative attitudes of school personnel towards their family composition (as defined by noted value judgments being made by educators, and observed biases in favor of traditional families). Furthermore, 37% of those parent/caregivers that knew, indicated that their child had been affected by (negative) comments at school about their family composition. A large number of comments referred to a negative general attitude towards alternative family compositions, with students' peers often being cited as those responsible for such comments.

The questions posed in the statement of the problem with regard to this topic, what are the attitudes of school personnel towards alternative families, and what is the level of acceptance of such diversity, are in part answered here. It appears that there is generally a positive attitude towards alternative families, as reported by parent/caregivers. However, there appears also to be some reservation expressed by both parent/caregivers (with 20% of those who expressed an opinion clearly stating that they experienced prevailing negative attitudes towards their families) and some teachers themselves openly stating some value judgments and personal biases in favor of traditional families. Acceptance of diversity is more difficult to qualify, especially due to some of the stated limitations of the study (such as the lack of observations in classrooms). From the evidence obtained through the surveys (of both parent/caregivers and teachers) however, at this time the researchers sense a general climate of acceptance amongst teachers, but perceive this acceptance as being sometimes discriminatory against specific compositions, individual to each teacher, and covert, with acceptance not always translating into practice.

Areas of clear acceptance and sensitivity can be seen in the fact that more and more educators are planning events or activities linking home and school that are inclusive of those children and parent/caregivers from alternative family compositions. It now appears that when events are planned, educators are organizing alternative functions (or are using more inclusive terms to label existing events) that encompass a wider variety of family and community members than those in traditional roles. Although there appears to be an increased level of acceptance and sensitivity, fifty per cent of educators indicated that they still ask their students to make presents for mother/ father at school (a clearly exclusive activity), many still use terms that are not inclusive of non-parents, texts being used largely do not represent alternative family compostitions, and the forms being used in school-home communication are clearly exlcusive in their phrasing and format.

The overall impression gained from the research with regard to the connection between a child's family composition and educators' expectations of their performance is that most educators do link the two environments (school and home). Several educators qualified their opinions by making a distinction between family composition and stability of the relationships in a child's home. However, other comments made clear distinctions between two-parent and alternative compostions as the main influence on school performance. A high number of parent/caregiver respondants' comments suggested that their children are not expected to be high achievers, as a direct result of their composition, with 36% clearly supporting that view.

The final point to address, and possibly the most important and significant aspect of this study, is the emphasis on the children themselves, which can be seen in the following question: Are children from alternative family compositions functioning within lower teacher expectations and a prevailing perception of being more "at risk" than students from traditional families? On the basis of this research alone, it is difficult to determine the extent to which educators harbor differentiated expectations of students based upon family compositions. A high proportion of teacher respondants (almost 70%) felt that a student's family composition impacted on his/her social, emotional and academic performance in school. Although it is not completely clear whether composition or quality of the home environment is being viewed as the significant determinant of a child's school performance, the majority of teachers alluded to stability and quality of the environment as the key factors. However, responses from both parent/caregivers and teachers themselves clearly document the presence of observable biases in favor of the more traditional family compositions. Therefore, in attempting to answer the above question, it can be stated that, yes, some children from alternative family compositions do function within lower teacher expectations and a prevailing perception of being more "at risk" than students from traditional families; but at this time, it also appears that the majority of students from alternative family compositions are not subject to such lower expectations from teachers. The fact that some do though, warrants a need for change in this area. It is the researchers' opinion that no student should function within lower or higher expectations on the basis of their family composition.

The researchers recognize the challenges presented by the issues addressed in this study. As educators ourselves, we also appreciate the wealth of responsibilities already placed upon teachers by society, which extend beyond being facilitators of knowledge and development of children. It is certainly not the intention of this study to place additional burden on schools. In the light of the information compiled and presented in this research, it is clear that school personnel are already making positive changes in practices related to this topic. At the same time, we have identified additional areas to focus upon in order to continue to accept the responsibility as facilitators of knowledge and development for all students.

In closing, the above discussion leads to two final thoughts--one for educators and one for parent/caregivers. Firstly, it appears to be very clear that educators are aware of the changing nature of today's families, but that this awareness is not yet fully or consistently translating into changes in their practices. It therefore appears pertinent for educators to go beyond the awareness level by reflecting on the present changes in the family and becoming metacognizant of their own practices in relation to families--both those considered to be "alternative" and those considered to be "traditional". To do that, the need to be fully informed with regard to the unique nature of each family composition is vital. Not only is it extremely important for educators to be fully aware and informed of the diversity of students' home environments, it is also extremly important to educate today's students so that they are similarly informed, since familiarity and information may lead to comfort and acceptance. The families of today shape the families of tomorrow; and students of today are the parent/caregivers and educators of tomorrow.

The second thought, addressed to parent/caregivers, focuses on the importance of increasing the visibility of alternative family compositions, both in schools and the broader community. Although it is not solely their responsibility, parent/caregivers must take a more active role in educating both teachers and students in the hopes that this will lead to a greater awareness and understanding of the unique nature of their family compositions. Parent/caregivers also need to take a more active role in the overall education of their children, in order to be more informed themselves as to the practices and materials in school, and to be a part of the decision making process with regard to chosen curricula and texts. Together, educators and parent/caregivers need to determine the direction and the future of public education, and lead society with regard to the inclusivity, acceptance and health of all families.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Note: Additional recommendations can be found at the end of each section of data analysis, specific to each population surveyed or school material analyzed.

1) With the apparent agreement by both parent/caregivers and educators that an awareness of a child's home environment is of extreme importance, it is highly recommended that teachers have that information. The responsibility for obtaining that information though, must be shared by both educators and parent/caregivers, with the establishment of non-threatening means for transmitting such information to be used on an ongoing basis. It is felt by the researchers that parent/caregivers have the responsibility to make themselves more visible and become more involved in schools. At the same time, it is recommended that teachers create a non-threatening means of soliciting information at the beginning of each school year, as well as throughout the year; and that they also create situations which allow for face-to-face contact with parent/caregivers.

2) Due to the apparent lack of awareness by parent/caregivers with regard to textbooks, school materials, classroom discussion and library books, it is highly recommended that parent/caregivers be more actively involved in their

children's education, and raise their awareness of materials being used and activities occurring in the schools that their children attend. It is also recommended that teachers do more to disseminate this information to parent/caregivers to assist this increase of awareness.

3) With agreement from all three strands of the study that textbooks are not representing a variety of family compositions, it is recommended that schools be more selective in their choice of textbooks used; and supplement the information they present with more inclusive materials than are presently being used, to allow for a more complete and inclusive representation of families. Texts should be reviewed and updated regularly.

4) Since the results of this research indicate that classroom discussion and library books offered to children do appear to be more inclusive of alternative family compositions, it is recommended that these practices continue; and that educators strive to be aware of changes in the family and make changes accordingly.

5) It is highly recommended that a comprehensive, school-wide curriculum be developed to focus on alternative lifestyles and family compositions with identified goals, such as: Transfer of accurate knowledge about alternative family forms, to assist students in clarifying their value positions in order to make

responsible lifestyle decisions based upon these values, and to help students become more accepting of the lifestyle choices of others (Macklin and Rubin, 1983).

6) Due to the fact that the responsibility of providing an appropriate education for children belongs equally to educators, parent/caregivers, and the wider community, it is strongly recommended that committees be formed to determine the content of books, curricula and other materials used. This may ensure a balanced representation of "family", rather than a potential "hidden curriculum" or one that is driven by publishing companies.

7) Since the contact forms currently being used by schools are clearly not inclusive of alternative families, it is recommended that schools revise their format and language to make them more inclusive; and that they commit to updating them regularly as changes occur (see Appendix E).

8) It is recommended that teachers continue to use the terms they are most comfortable with, such as "parents", "mom", "dad", in classrooms; but not exclusively. Additional terms that are highly recommended, due to the fact that they will be inclusive of all students from traditional and non-traditional households are: Caregiver(s), the adult(s) you live with, someone you care about at home. Whatever terms are chosen, it is

recommended to make them school-wide, with regard to both written and verbal communication.

9) Although communication appears to be an area of strength, as viewed by both educators and parent/caregivers, it is recommended that educators continue to change (as needed) with today's ever-changing family.

10) It is highly recommended that school administrators and parent/caregivers provide--and that teachers actively seek--further information about the unique nature of alternative family compositions. As educators become more comfortable interacting with diverse family situations, it may make those families--particularly children--become more accepting of their circumstances.

11) Due to the continual state of evolution of today's family, as well as the multitude of expressed comments by educators with regard to "legal concerns", it is highly recommended that school districts work further in conjunction with representatives from the legal profession to determine their position and/or involvement with students' households, in relation to such issues as: Custodial and non- custodial parent/caregivers, alternative (non-related) caregivers, consent, and confidentiality. Once this has been established, district-

wide in-service and training is highly recommended for all school personnel.

12) Due to the feedback received from parent/caregivers as to the perceived difficulty in communicating concerns to school personnel, it is recommended that a non-threatening (possibly anonymous) avenue be established to allow parent/caregivers to express their views on classroom and school-wide practices. This would be most effective if done on a consistent and regular basis, with some formal review procedure in place that would acknowledge concerns raised and indicate accommodations made where necessary.

13) It is recommended that educators take care in making positive or negative assumptions with regard to a child's potential and their family composition. Such assumptions may lead to lower/higher expectations of student performance, that may interfere with the development of the child. If possible, there needs to be a high level of awareness of a child's family and home circumstances, without linking this to their school performance.

14) It is strongly recommended that educators attempt to be metacognitive with regard to their personal beliefs and practices related to family compositions, in an attempt to rid themselves of their own biases. "Regardless of one's personal views and

moral stance, today's...educator must recognize the existence of...alternative family forms, and help students explore the 'pros and cons' of such lifestyles, both academically and personally." (Macklin and Rubin, 1983).

15) In light of the present sensitivity and move by educators towards more inclusivity when planning events/ activities, it is recommended that these practices continue and that they improve upon the positive steps already taken.

16) It is strongly recommended that further study be undertaken that addresses these issues. Future research should include: Views from a traditional (two biological parent) family sample; percentages of respondants from the various family compositions that match the demographic profile and statistics for the geographical area being studied; observations in schools to determine actual practices; solicitation of students' opinions with regard to the school's attitude towards and acceptance of their family composition, as well as their recommendations for change; and the use of interview rather than survey format, to decrease the potential for misinterpretation or misunderstanding of questions of respondants, researcher misinterpretation of responses, limiting respondants to single sentence comments, and restricting follow-up questions by researchers.

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APPENDICES

A. SURVEY OF PARENT/CAREGIVER(S)

B. REQUEST TO DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR TO DO RESEARCH

C. SURVEY OF TEACHERS

D. FORM TO EVALUATE TEXT

E. DRAFT SCHOOL CONTACT FORM

F. INCLUSIVE EXAMPLE OF SCHOOL CONTACT FORM

G. EXCLUSIVE EXAMPLE OF SCHOOL CONTACT FORM

APPENDIX A

c/o Graduate Education Office
Saint Michael's College
Winooski Park
Colchester, Vermont 05439

4/9/92

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

We are graduate students at Saint Michael's College, working on a Master's Degree in Education. With the approval of the Burlington School District, we are conducting research on the role of the school with regard to the changing composition of Burlington students' families. In order to gain the perceptions of parents and caregivers on this subject, we are asking you to complete the enclosed survey.

The information you provide will be one of the most important areas of data collection for us to refer to when writing our paper. This is your opportunity to express your opinions, which may in turn shape local school policy and curriculum on this topic. With this in mind, we ask you to offer your thoughtful and honest opinions.

Please be assured that all information that is gathered will be strictly confidential. Neither your name, nor even the school's name will be attached to your survey, or to our final report. A copy of our final paper will be made available to you upon request. Our projected date of completion is June, 1992.

Thank you for your time and assistance. May we ask that you complete the survey in a timely fashion, using the envelope provided. If you have any questions or comments, please contact us at the above address.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Dickin
Graduate Student
Saint Michael's College

Sandra J. Limoge
Graduate Student
Saint Michael's College

SURVEY OF PARENT/CAREGIVER(S)

Directions: Please check the appropriate blanks (___)

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Please indicate which term best describes your family composition:

Both Natural Parents __

Step Parents __

Single Parent (mother only)__

Single Parent (father only)__

Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home __

Foster/Adoptive Parents __

Same Sex Parents __

Non-parent Relative (please specify) ________________________

Other (please specify) ______________________________

2. Is your child currently attending public school?_____

What is their grade level?_______

3. Do school personnel know your family composition ?

Yes __ No __ Don't Know __

4. Do you think the school should know about your family composition ?

Yes __ No __ No Opinion __

Please explain briefly:____________________________________

____

____

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

5. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g. single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your child uses ?

Yes __ No __ Don't Know __

b. The other school materials your child is exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc) ?

Yes __ No __ Don't Know __

c. Classroom discussion ?

Yes __ No __ Don't Know __

d. School library books ?

Yes __ No __ Don't Know __

6. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials ? Yes __ No __ No opinion __

b. Classroom discussion ? Yes __ No __ No opinion __

Please explain briefly:______________________________

____

____

III. COMMUNICATION

7. Do you feel that school registration and health forms allow for your family composition to be included (e.g. is there space on the forms for a non-parent to respond) ?

Yes __ No __ No opinion __

8. Do you have any suggestions for making these forms more sensitive to your family composition ?

____

____

____

9. How would you describe the quality of your communication with the school?

Excellent __ Adequate __ Unsatisfactory __

10. If you are unsatisfied with your communication with the school, do you feel it is related to school personnel opinions of your family composition?

Yes __ No __ No opinion __

11. When communication (such as phone calls, letters, permission for field trips) does occur between school and home, do you feel you are being addressed in an acceptable way?

Yes __ No __ No opinion __

Please explain briefly:______________________________
____
____

IV. ATTITUDES OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

12. How would you describe the attitudes of school personnel towards your family composition?

Positive __ Negative __ Indifferent __

Please explain briefly:______________________________
____
____

13. Do you feel that schol personnel need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both natural parents ____
Step parents ____
Single parent (mother only) ____
Single parent (father only) ____
Single parent with non-parent adult living in the home ___
Foster/adoptive parents ____
Same sex parents ____
Non-parent relative ____
Other (please specify)______________________________

Please explain briefly:______________________________
____

14. Has your child ever been affected by comments at school about your family composition?

Yes __ No __ Don't Know __

Please explain briefly:______________________________________

15. Do you feel that school personnel link your child's potential school performance to your family composition?

Yes __ No __ Don't Know __

Please explain briefly:______________________________________

16. Does the school assume that your child's mother and father are both in the home (for example, by asking your child to interview mom or dad for a homework assignment) ?

Yes __ No __ Don't Know __

Please explain briefly:______________________________________

17. Additional Comments:______________________________________

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

APPENDIX B

To: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
District Administrator

From: Sandra Limoge and Paul Dickin
Graduate Students, Saint Michael's College

Re: Application for Cooperation in a Research Project

Date: 2/27/92

I. General Objectives:

The purpose of this study is to establish the presence of alternative family structures in public schools today, with a focus on their visibility and acceptance in both explicit and implicit ways. Our study will include perspectives of both school personnel and families. A review of the literature will clearly document the continuing changes in the family structure; and will also discuss existing research on the significance of both formal and "hidden" curricula in relation to family structures. Our hypothesis is that alternative family structures are not being made visible in elementary school classrooms, either through formal curricula and textbooks; or through the "hidden" curricula. A second, dependent hypothesis is that many individuals have a negative view of alternative families and perceive these homes as less functional than the traditional family form. The purpose of our study in the XXXXXXXXXXX School District is to determine whether or not our hypotheses are supported, and to make recommendations for future practices based on our findings.

II. Specific Objectives:

1. To identify the extent of inclusion of non-traditional families, through illustrations and story content, in elementary school texts. Are non-traditional families represented in these texts, and if so, are they positive or negative representations?

2. To what extent are identified concepts that deal with family structure represented in formal elementary grades curricula? Are teachers addressing these issues in a formal education program?

3. Are educators aware of the current variations in family structures? Are teaching staff aware of their own "hidden" curricula, with regard to attitudes or conveyance of stereotypes concerning non-traditional families? Is the language being used inclusive of alternative family structures? Are students from alternative family backgrounds viewed differently in terms of their ability to succeed in school? Do educators perceive the issue of inclusion as one of importance?

4. What are parents/guardians' perceptions of the school's formal curriculum and textbook selection in the area of "the family"? Do they feel that their lifestyle is being positively represented? What kind of general attitude do school personnel show toward their family structure?

III. Procedures:

The following procedures are intended to be employed in attempting to meet the project objectives:

1. A survey will be made available to elementary educators in specific schools and will be completed on a voluntary basis. There will be no in-school activities by those conducting the project, or interference with current practice.

2. A second survey will be made available to parents, again to be completed on a voluntary basis.

3. All information will be treated as confidential, with surveys completed anonymously. The results of our study will be used to raise awareness levels of individuals connected with public education, and will be presented in reference to the broad topic of the need for a more positve representation and attitude towards individuals in alternative families. Participating schools will not be identified.

IV. Research Design:

Our research designs are relatively straightforward and their nature is based on well-documented information regarding bias avoidance and quantification of data produced.

1. To effect our first objective (textbook analysis), we have drawn from significant previous studies (N.Evans, 1983; R.Kealey, 1980) to identify appropriate target words and groupings on which to base our results. Illustrations and the nature of text perspective can be reliably judged using these proven techniques.

2. In order to assess the inclusion of alternative family structures/lifestyles within formal curricula, we intend both to review official curricula from our targetted schools; and to include a section of associated questions in our survey to be completed by teachers.

3. To obtain information on teachers' awareness of their own "hidden" curricula with regard to family structure, we are developing a series of metacognitive questions for teachers to self-complete. Again, guidelines are being drawn from our literature reviews to word questions without bias, and to elicit quantifiable data.

4. As above, a survey is being designed for parent/guardian completion, drawn from a similar frame of reference.

Our data will be quantifiable to the extent that it can be grouped or clustered to build a picture of usage/awareness of identified factors. No statistical analysis is necessary.

Given an approval to begin surveying in the first week of April, we anticipate a 3-week time period to have completed surveys returned to us, and to have concluded our textbook analyses. Our projected research completion date (ie publishing date of the report) is May/June, 1992.

V. System Involvement:

Our research requires only minimal intrusion on the school system. We envision targetting two elementary schools in Burlington and conducting a blanket survey of all interested teaching staff. An estimation of the time required of each teacher to complete the survey questions is about 15 - 20 minutes.

A survey of interested parents from a variety of family structures will also be conducted. A discussion on how to facilitate this aspect of our study is requested.

Access to school texts is required for approximately a 3-week period. This analysis can be conducted away from the school.

Students will not be affected by our research.

APPENDIX C

Graduate Education Office
Saint Michael's College
Winooski Park
Colchester, Vermont 05439

4/9/92

Dear Colleague,

We are graduate students at Saint Michael's College, working on a Master's Degree in Education. With the approval of your school district, we are conducting research on the role of the school with regard to the changing composition of students' families. In order to gain the perceptions of teachers in this district, we are asking you to complete the enclosed survey.

The information you provide will be one of the most important areas of data collection for us to refer to when writing our paper. This is your opportunity to express your opinions, which may in turn shape local school policy and curriculum on this topic. With this in mind, we ask you to offer your thoughtful and honest opinions.

Please be assured that all information that is gathered will be strictly confidential. Neither your name, nor even the school's name will be attached to your survey, or to our final report. A copy of our final paper will be made available to you upon request. Our projected date of completion is June, 1992.

Thank you for your time and assistance. May we ask that you complete the survey by April 17, and return it to your school administrative office. If you have any questions or comments, please contact us at the above address.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Dickin	Sandra J. Limoge
Graduate Student	Graduate Student
Saint Michael's College	Saint Michael's College

SURVEY OF TEACHERS

Current teaching position___________________________________

Grade level______________ Years teaching_____________

Directions: Please check the appropriate blanks (___)

I. STUDENT INFORMATION

1. Do you know the current family compositions of your students?

Yes__ No__

2. Please indicate the percentage of your students you believe come from the following family compositions:

Both Natural Parents ___
Step Parents ___
Single Parent (mother only) ___
Single Parent (father only) ___
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home ___
Foster/Adoptive Parents ___
Same Sex Parents ___
Non-Parent Relative ___
Other (please specify) ___________________________

3. Do you feel it is important information to have?

Yes__ No__ No Opinion__

Please explain briefly:_____________________________________
____
____

II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM AND MATERIALS

4. Are there a variety of family compositions (e.g.single father, two-parent family, single mother, adopted children, non-parent adult living in the home, etc) included in:

a. The textbooks your students use?

Yes__ No__ Don't know__ Don't use__

b. The other school materials your students are exposed to (e.g. workbooks, filmstrips, etc)?

Yes__ No__ Don't know__ Don't use__

c. Classroom discussion?

Yes__ No__ Don't know__ Don't use__

d. School library books?

Yes__ No__ Don't know__ Don't use__

Please explain briefly:______________________________________

____

____

5. Do you feel it is important to have a variety of family compositions represented in:

a. School materials? Yes__ No__ No opinion__

b. Classroom discussion? Yes__ No__ No opinion__

Please explain briefly:______________________________________

____

____

III. COMMUNICATION

6. When referring to the adults your students live with, what terms do you use?

7. When contacting students' families, with whom do you typically communicate (e.g. mother, guardian, father, babysitter)?

8. How would you describe the quality of that communication?

Excellent__ Adequate__ Unsatisfactory__

If you are unsatisfied with the quality of home/school communication, do you feel it is related to the student's family composition?

Yes__ No__ No opinion__

Please explain briefly:

9. What is your level of comfort in dealing with the following family compositions?

	Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Uncomfortable
Both natural parents			
Step parents			
Foster/adoptive parents			
Same sex parents			
Single parent (mother only)			
Single parent (father only)			
Single parent with non-parent adult in the home			
Non-parent relative			

IV. PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY COMPOSITIONS

10. Do you need more information to deal effectively with any of the family compositions listed below?

Both Natural Parents ___
Step Parents ___
Single Parent (mother only) ___
Single Parent (father only) ___
Single Parent with non-parent adult living in the home ___
Foster/Adoptive Parents ___
Same Sex Parents ___
Non-Parent Relative ___
Other (please specify) ______________________

Please explain briefly: ______________________________________
____
____

11. Do you feel that students' emotional or behavioral stability is closely linked to their family composition?

Yes __ No __ No opinion __

Please explain briefly: ______________________________________
____
____

12. Do you feel that students' academic performance is closely linked to their family composition?

Yes __ No __ No opinion __

Please explain briefly:______________________________

13. Do you ...:

a. plan social events at school for only mother or father to attend with the child (for example, Breakfast with Dad, Mother and Daughter Dinner, etc.)?

Yes __ No __

b. ask your students to interview their mother/father for a class assignment?

Yes __ No __

c. ask your students to make presents for mother/father at school?

Yes __ No __

d. plan other activities for the adults your students live with?

Yes __ No __

Please explain briefly:______________________________

14. Additional comments:

APPENDIX D

TEXT NAME: YEAR:
TEXT TYPE: PUBLISHER:

Total # of units: # dealing with family: %

Total # of pages: # dealing with family: %

Terms used to refer to caregiver	Frequency	% of total	Frequency of Illustrations	% of total
Mother				
Father				
Parents				

Family Composition	Frequency of Reference		% of total	Frequency & Nature of Reference		
	Imp	Exp		Pos	Indif	Neg
Both natural parents						
Step parents						
Single parent (mother)						
Single parent (father)						
Single parent + adult						
Foster/adoptive						
Same sex						
Non-parent relative						

APPENDIX E

NAME OF DISTRICT
STUDENT INFORMATION FORM

STUDENT

Student's Name: ____________________ Male/Female
Date of Birth: ____________________ Grade: _____
Date form completed: ____________________

FAMILY

Adult(s) student lives with:

Primary Home and parent/caregiver(s) during school year:
Name: ____________________
Relationship: ____________ Custody: ____________
Address: ____________________
Place of Employment: ____________________
Home Phone: ____________ Work Phone: ____________
Other Adults in Home: ____________ Relationship: _____
Other Children in Home: ____________________

Other Home and Parent/caregiver(s) student may live with:
Name: ____________________
Relationship: ____________ Custody: ____________
Address: ____________________
Place of Employment: ____________________
Home Phone: ____________ Work Phone: ____________
Other Adults in Home: ____________ Relationship: _____
Other Children in Home: ____________________

Other individuals the student considers to be
parent/caregiver(s): ____________________
Address: ____________________

Explanation, if necessary: ____________________
____

EMERGENCY

Individuals to Contact in case of an Emergency:
Name: ____________________ Relationship: _______
Home Phone: ____________ Work Phone: ____________
Name: ____________________ Relationship: _______
Home Phone: ____________ Work Phone: ____________

Doctor's Name: ____________________
Address: ____________________
Phone: ____________________

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Current legal restrictions on access to child or information about this child:

Name:______________________________ Relationship:_____

Nature of restriction:________________________________

____

Has this student experienced any social, emotional or physical problems which may affect adjustment to school? If so, please explain:________________________________

____

____

Does this student have any significant medical condition that school personnel should know about?_________________

If so, please explain:________________________________

____

____

Please include any other information you feel is necessary for the school to know at this time:____________________

____

____

____

____

____

____

Should any of the information on this form change, please notify the school. Thank-you for your time and assistance.

____
Signature - Relationship to student

____
Date

Appendix F

Date: ____________

Name of Student: ______________________ D.O.B. ___/___/___

Entering Grade ___

Home Address: ______________________ Home Phone ____________

Student's Doctor: ____________ Address: ____________ Phone: ______

Father's Name: ____________ Address: ____________ Phone: ______

Mother's Name: ____________ Address: ____________ Phone: ______

Marital Status: Married ___ Divorced ___ Remarried ___
Single ___ Separated ___ Other ___

Guardian's Name: ____________ Address: ____________ Phone: ______

Student Lives With: ______________________________

Local Person to Call in Case of Emergency: Name: ____________
Telephone: ____________ Address: ______________________

VISION HISTORY

Date of last eye Exam ____________ By whom? ____________
Glasses? ______ Contact lenses? ________
Other eye problems i.e. (muscle problem/injury/surgery) ________
____

Special classroom consideration needed? ____________
____

Eye specialist: ____________ Address ____________ Phone: ______

HEARING HISTORY

Date of last hearing exam ____________ by whom? ____________
Hearing devices? ______ Eartubes? ______ When inserted? ______
Tubes in place? ______ Other ear problems (i.e. infection, injury)
____

Special classroom considerations needed? ____________
____

Ear specialist: ____________ Address: ____________ Phone: ______

5/89

- OVER -

IMMUNIZATION RECORD

An up to date record of this child's immunizations needs to accompany this form. A copy of your record will be made by the school and your copy will be returned to you.

It is a State law that all children have an up to date immunization record on file before entry into our school.

IMMUNIZATION HISTORY: Record Month, Day, and Year:

IMMUNIZATION	1	2	3	4	5
DTP (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis)					
DT (Pediatric Diphtheria, Tetanus)					
Td (Adult Tetanus, Diphtheria)					
Tetanus - Note Type					
Polio - Note Type					
MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella)					
Measles					
Rubella					
Mumps					
HIB - Note Type					
Tuberculin					
Other					

Physician Diagnosed Measles Disease:

Month/Year

Exempt:

Medical ☐

Religious ☐

Moral ☐

Attach signed form

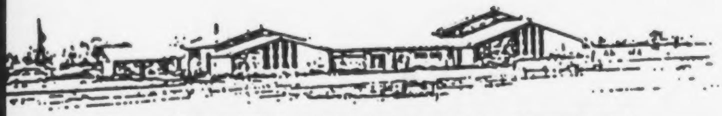
ORAL HEALTH HISTORY

Date of last dental exam: ____________________ Dentist: __________
Address: ____________________________________ Phone: __________

Orthodontics/braces? __________ Orthodontics/specialist: __________
Address: ____

Other oral health problems (i.e. surgery/injury) ________________

5/89



OTHER SIGNIFICANT MEDICAL HISTORY

In reviewing the following checklist please provide additional information for each yes response.

Health Problems:	No	Yes (explain)
Allergies (please list)		
Asthma		
Bronchial/Respiratory Problems:		
Bleeding Problems		
Chicken Pox		
Diabetes		
Fainting/Blackouts		
Fractures/Sprains		
Heart Conditions		
Hepatitis		
Kidney/Bladder Problems		
Operations		
Seizures		
Smokers in household		

-OVER-

Past Hospitalizations (explain)

Birth Weight: ____________ Isolette/Incubator? ___________

Birth Complications (explain)

List Medications Currently Taking

Date of last physical exam: ________________________

Other Illnesses: (Rheumatic fever, Pneumonia, Scarlet Fever, etc.)

Other Significant Conditions:

Name of anyone who is forbidden to have access to this child? _______

Has this child experienced any social, emotional, or physical problems which may affect adjustment to school?

Is there any significant family medical history that we should know about? (i.e.: diabetes, seizures, heart, etc.)

____

Signature - Relationship to child

____

Date

5/89

STUDENT BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

ppendix G

Student Name: ______________________________ Student #: ____________
[last] [first] [middle] [office use on

ADDRESS ______________________________ Phone: ____________

____

Date of Birth ______________________________ Birthplace: ____________
Citizenship: ____________

Father's Name ______________________________ Occupation: ____________

Mother's Name ______________________________ Occupation: ____________

Status of Parents:
- ____ Together
- ____ Separated
- ____ Divorced
- ____ Father Deceased
- ____ Mother Remarried
- ____ Mother Deceased
- ____ Father Remarried

Siblings: (in order of birth)

	Name	Date of Birth	School They Are Attending	Grade
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Others Living in Home: ______________________________

School Previously Attended: ______________________________
[name]

____
[address]

Grades Repeated: ______________________________

Additional Comments: ______________________________

____

____

____

Date Form Completed: ___/___/___ By: ______________________________
[Signature]

This form will remain in the student's permanent file.